

you go through ceremonies. I am a California Indian and all our ceremonies are gone. But I was fortunate enough to travel throughout the United States and meet people who lived in tribes that had ceremonies and invited me in.'

For 12 years, Natchez participated in the Sun Dance in South Dakota, a gruelling three or four-day ceremony dating back at least 300 years in which dancers circle a tree trunk and pray for spiritual rebirth and earth regeneration. 'Being hooked up to that tree allowed me to examine my own life in a way that I may never have, if I hadn't gone through those ceremonies,' Natchez says. 'Whenever anyone goes through any type of healing, you have to travel through pain and despair. But when you come out the other end, you leave out the anger and bitterness and hatred. I feel I'm really fortunate to be educated in two worlds [and] have that knowledge.'

Natchez's art is an invigorating storm of influences and icons. Inspired by Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns and other Pop artists, his paintings exude the power of colour and familiar objects. The artist often starts his canvases with artefacts of American culture that either directly or indirectly reflect Indians: an 1866 *Harper's Weekly* cover depicting Native Americans; broken treaties between the US government and tribes; dictionary pages to represent the Tataviam's lost language. Then he includes figures such as Native Americans, mission priests and cowboys. Intricate 'stars and stripes' beadwork adds texture to bold works that emanate beauty and joy.

For Natchez, spirituality is intertwined with art. 'They're really one,' he says. '[In] the earliest forms of native art, the people who painted on the hides, painted on the rocks, beaded the moccasins and did the quillwork were the medicine men and women. Even in the old days, they realised it was a great gift to create art because it came from the spiritual world.' He also

stresses that for Native Americans, spirituality infuses every part of life, especially the family. 'In the traditional way, the elders teach us that you don't just live spirituality for a day; you live it every day,' he emphasises. 'I think all spiritual people in the world have that in common. It's how you treat yourself and your elders and children.'

The kids are getting antsy at Natchez's feet as he wraps up their discussion. But as a

senator in the Tataviam tribe who lives far away in Tempe, Arizona, he has a parting message for them before the art collectors arrive: 'Our families have lived here in California for tens of thousands of years,' Natchez says. 'There were over 300 Indian languages in California alone. We're an ancient people here. And today we're well educated; we're intellectuals. Don't be afraid to stand up and say, "Hey, I'm Tataviam."' ■



Stan Natchez, *Clan Mothers going to Washington*



Stan Natchez, *Two Hatchet*

FOUR WINDS GALLERY
02 9328 7951
www.fourwindsgallery.com.au

Katie Winchell is a freelance writer with a passionate interest in Native American cultures. Article reproduced courtesy Wholelife Times – www.wholelifetimes.com