

The Native American Indian Pop Artist Stan Natchez at Four Winds Gallery



'I feel fortunate for having been raised in the city because of the perspective it gave me on modern life. However, without an awareness of our traditional heritage, we as Native Americans have no identity. By taking the best of the both worlds, the modern and the traditional, we are better able to find balance in our lives.'

Stan Natchez

Stan Natchez is an admired Native American artist who enjoys strong international recognition. His work celebrates and depicts the beauty, richness, ironies and realities that connect and balance modern and traditional themes – the spiritual and material, the structured and creative spheres. These are often expressed with a sense of humour, which has been described as sardonic and intelligent.

His worlds are today's modern American and Western civilisations and his traditional Native American culture. Natchez narrates his storytelling or view with brilliant vibrancy through the power of layered colours, and then combines familiar and traditional imagery in a pop art fashion, a genre that very much influences him.

Stan Natchez has transmitted his love for art, society and cultures as well as the

traditions and beliefs of his people to his sons, who are also currently producing works and exhibiting worldwide. This transcending of generations reaches all societies.

Early artistry and education

Stan Natchez is Shoshoni/Paiute Indian, born 14 November 1954 in Los Angeles California. Growing up in the Valley he was immersed in philosophy, art and the mystic lore of his Native American Indian beliefs and spirituality. His urban upbringing grounded him in modern society and beliefs.

His father was an intellectual who authored a thesis followed by a book on the connections between Jungian and Native American symbolism. His grandmother and mother provided his foundation in the arts by teaching him traditional skills, such as basket making, painting and beadwork.

Stan performed as a traditional dancer in major cities throughout Europe and the USA. One of his pieces was the Sun Dance in South Dakota, a ceremony dating from 300 years ago, in which dancers circle a tree trunk and pray for spiritual rebirth and earth regeneration. Stan believes that dance is a tool for gaining a stronger sense of cultural self-esteem. Through his dancing, he further developed an eye for colour and composition, drawing on his unique involvement in making

ceremonial costumes.

As a young student at San Fernando High, Natchez was described as 'creative' for not always staying between the lines. Undeterred, he earned undergraduate and Master's degrees and taught art, including ten years as a history and humanities teacher at the Orme School in Arizona that has an exceptional achievement rate of 100 per cent of graduates being accepted into tertiary education. During his Orme School appointment he was also an editor for *Native Peoples Magazine*, another medium in which to express his passion for his Native American culture.

Following this decade, he developed as a full-time artist. His diverse upbringing and depth of education provided Natchez with many influences, evident in his creations that express beauty and joy and encompass his political and personal beliefs.

Finding balance between two societies

Stan enjoys meeting with young Native American Indians, expressing his artistic views and encouraging them to find balance between their two societies, traditional and western. At one such meeting, pointing to his painting, Natchez says in his comfortable confident manner:

'You see this Pepsi bottle cap? I'm painting

the life I live in. Just because we're Indian, it doesn't mean we don't drink Pepsi or have MTV at home. We're modern. Everybody thinks we live in tipis, but we don't live in the old times. [In this painting] the Pepsi bottle cap represents the world we live in and the Indian on the horse represents native culture. It's really important to keep our culture, because we live in a time of X-box and Nintendo, so it's easy sometimes to forget that you're Indian.'

A young person asked, 'Why do you put dollars on paintings?' Natchez explained, 'When I paint the dollar bill, I'm saying that the dollar bill is a symbol of the world we live in. When you go to the store, what do you need to buy something? You need money, right? In the 1700s and 1800s Indians painted on deerskin, buffalo or elk hides. And if you wanted something, hides were your money. So the modern day hide is the dollar bill.'

This symbolism highlights the thinking and challenges for today's young Native American Indians. Once a thriving society, their ways of life were threatened by mission slavery, European diseases, land theft and brutal extermination. They have yet to benefit from Federal recognition in 1855 and legal struggles continue. A renewal of Native American culture is thriving, providing hope,