

Shan Goshorn

INTERTWINED Statement

I consider myself to be an artist who starts with an idea—most frequently a human rights issue that targets Indian people—and then chooses the medium through which that idea can best be expressed. In the last ten years I have deliberately challenged myself to stretch beyond the paint, photography and metalwork of my formal training to explore new formats and media. Surprisingly, I have found myself drawn back to the traditional crafts of my tribe as a powerful way to bring awareness to issues that affect Native people today. One particular skill that has tapped my passion: the ancestral art of making baskets.

In 2007, I discovered a creative twist on traditional basket weaving as a more effective way to present topics already prevalent in my work, such as tribal sovereignty, repatriation, removal from ancestral homelands, genocide, treaty violation, the stereotypical use of Indian names and images in commercial products, the far reaching impact of boarding schools, and more. The dominant white culture often misinterprets photographs, documents and, even, Indian baskets. Native American people, myself included, have the right and responsibility to tell their own histories.

The time-honored shapes, patterns and functions of Cherokee baskets inspire the form of my work, but I weave with the contemporary medium of Arches Watercolor paper. Since first contact, paper (and the written word) has been used as a weapon against Native Americans. By creating baskets out of paper digitally printed with a variety of documents and photographs, my work offers an opportunity to re-examine history from a unique perspective.

In 2011, I was honored to receive the Grand Prize award on behalf of my basket Educational Genocide; The Legacy of the Carlisle Indian Boarding School from RED EARTH Indian Art Show- a prestigious Native American art market in Oklahoma City. This work addresses the infamous government institution, which forced assimilation upon thousands of Native children. When newspaper coverage of the event included a photo of this basket, the article inspired a traditional Kiowa elder to travel a long distance to see it. As I explained the message behind the basket, she listened carefully and began to cry when she saw the children's images and the hundreds of names woven into the interior. She said, *"This piece belongs in a museum. We need to use it to let everyone know about our history. It is one of our national treasures now."*

It was a deeply moving experience to see how my art affected someone in such a profound way. Consequently, I redirected my professional goals to include the research of historical documents and photographs, creating work that educates young America about the impact these policies still hold on us as contemporary people. A 2013 Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship granted me access to historical papers and objects - exposure to more knowledge and compelling evidence than I ever imagined. No matter where I was researching, ideas bombarded me at every turn-convincing me that not only are the ancestors supporting my efforts, but also they are *impatient* to have their stories told.

I have created approximately 175 baskets since my first one was completed in 2008. Upon my return from two research trips in DC, I have sketches and thoughts for over 60 more. People often ask me: Now that I have obtained a level of success, will I ever work in another medium?

My reply: I will create baskets as long as I feel challenged by the medium and believe it is a successful way to express my ideas. I witness audiences literally leaning into these baskets to better understand my messages and feel encouraged that my work is educating and inspiring honest dialogue between races, which has always been a goal of my work. I never want to become so comfortable with my medium that statements, research and final products become rote. There are too many issues that need to be righted on behalf of Indian people. I choose to accept this challenge out of respect for the sacrifices of the ancestors, who are entrusting me to tell this important version of our history.

Shan Goshorn
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