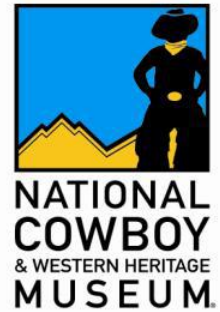


Allan Houser and His Students

On exhibit August 30, 2013 - May 11, 2014



In the exhibit, “Allan Houser and His Students,” The National Cowboy & Western Museum examines Houser as artist, teacher and mentor. As a boy, Houser became interested in the images found in magazines and books and began drawings and carvings at an early age. In 1934, a notice for an art school in Santa Fe attracted his attention. He enrolled that year in the Painting School at the Santa Fe Indian School. Commonly known as the Dorothy Dunn School, after its prominent teacher, its most famous student became Allan Houser. Just five years after enrolling at the Dunn School, he had his first major art exhibitions in San Francisco, Washington D.C., and Chicago. That same year he received a commission to paint a mural in the Department of Interior building in Washington D.C., and its success led to a second mural commission in 1940.

He married Anna Marie Gallegos in 1939, and together with two young sons they moved to Los Angeles in 1941 where Allan sought employment during the war effort. There he had the opportunity to visit museum exhibitions of European modernists such as Constantin Brancusi, Hans Arp, Jacques Lipschitz and Henry Moore, whose work would have a lasting influence on Houser.

In 1951, Allan Houser and his family moved to Brigham City, Utah, where he taught art at the Inter-Mountain Indian School for the next 11 years. He continued to paint and produce small wooden sculptures, and in 1954 he was honored by the French government with the Palmes d’Academie for his outstanding achievement as a teacher and artist.



Allan Houser teaching at the Institute of American Indian Arts, circa 1963. Houser joined the faculty of the new Native American art school, Institute of American Indian Art, in 1962 to head up the Institute’s sculpture department. Here Houser gathers students around to review work in progress.

IAIA photo, courtesy of the Allan Houser Archives

Houser was asked to join the faculty of the newly created Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, in 1962. There he created the sculpture department and began focusing his own artistic output on three-dimensional work. As he taught and created sculpture, he began integrating the aesthetics of the modernists’ movement with his narrative ideas. By the late 1960s he began exhibiting his sculpture. As recognition of his unique style grew, museums and private collectors sought out examples, and his influence became apparent on hundreds of students and other artists.

During this time Houser had a chance meeting with Glenn and Sandra Green, who just opened their new gallery for contemporary Southwestern art, The Gallery Wall Inc., in Phoenix, Arizona. “It was obvious that Allan was respected and loved by the students and other teachers,” Glenn said. “He was excited to introduce us to his students and their work. We noticed that other artists besides Indians came to his classes to get critiques. Allan had a very warm greeting for everyone . . . that here was a truly gifted, unusual man.”

He retired from teaching in 1975, devoting all his time to pursuing his own work. The two following decades were very productive for Houser. He would produce nearly 1,000 sculptures in stone, wood and bronze and emerge as a major figure on an international scale.

In 1993, he was an invited guest artist at the 21st annual National Academy of Western Art Exhibition (now the Prix de West). He was awarded the Prix de West Purchase Award for his bronze sculpture, *Smoke Signal*. In an interview with *Persimmon Hill* magazine that year Houser said, “I think that all I’ve witnessed, the stories my dad told me, gave me a lot of pride in who I really am and encouraged me to tell stories in my art. I felt strongly that I had something to offer, and I continue to do it in my way . . . my work is about my people’s beauty, their dignity, about showing, in my way, what I think of who I am, who they are, and making them proud. In my work, this is what I strive for, this dignity, this goodness that is in Man.”

Houser has been referred to as the “Grandfather of Contemporary Native American sculpture.” He has — without question — had the most influence in establishing the canons of Native sculpture. As a member of the inaugural faculty at the IAIA, he taught hundreds about sculpture. Many of his themes are based on stories he heard from his father about the lifeways of the Apache people before the dominant influence of Europeans.

Houser passed on his unique talents, vision and passion for pushing the boundaries of American Indian art to countless students who passed through the doors of the Institute, many of them would go on to make their own special mark in art history. Among the artists who called him friend, colleague, teacher and mentor were Kevin Red Star, Doug Hyde, Robert Chee, Earl Biss, TC Cannon, Fritz Sholder, Dan Namingham, Ben Harjo and John Hoover to mention a few.

Sculpted Portrait Activity

Allan Houser worked in a variety of mediums, including stone and clay, to create his artwork. When visiting “Allan Houser and His Students,” at the National Cowboy Museum be sure to see the marble sculpture *Apache Singer (study)* and the bronze bolo medallion, *Buffalo Dancer of the Rio Grande Pueblo*. Notice the different textures he used on each piece. Walk around the sculpture and view it from different angles. Does it look smooth or rough? What tools might he have used to work in stone? What tools might he have used to work in clay? Sculpture can be used to convey feelings and ideas. What does the facial expression mean to you?



Bronze Bolo Medallion, *Buffalo Dancer of the Rio Grande Pueblo*
Photo credit: Ed Muno



Marble Sculpture, *Apache Singer (study)*
Photo credit: Ed Muno

In this activity, students will create an original, three-dimensional piece of art through forming and carving clay. Varying Oklahoma Academic Standards for Visual Arts for elementary grade levels can be met with this activity. Vocabulary: portrait, original art, three-dimensional, armature, texture and sculpture.

Materials and tools

Self-hardening clay, approximately 6 oz.

Newspaper

Popsicle stick

Sheet of wax paper

Straw

Yarn or ribbon

Steps

Create an armature out of newspaper. Wad the newspaper into a tight ball until it is about the size of a baseball. Set aside

On a sheet of wax paper, roll clay into a ball, then divide in half. Using one ball of clay, begin to flatten and shape into a circle or oval. This will become the face. Place rounded shape on newspaper armature. Clay will rest on armature, but not cover.

Take the second ball of clay and divide in half again. Using one of these balls of clay, shape into a triangle; this will be the nose. To attach the nose to the face, lightly scratch or score the areas of clay that will meet. Gently smooth seams by using a popsicle stick or by dipping fingers in water and blending clay together.

Repeat process to create eyes and mouth, using the last ball of clay. Add other features such as hair or a hat. Remember to use the scratch-to-attach technique.

Different textures can be created on your bust by using everyday household materials. A plastic fork can be used to create evenly spaced lines or shallow indentions. Experiment using scraps of fabric, buttons, leaves or sandpaper.

When all details have been added, use a straw to gently create a hole in the top of the clay portrait, large enough for a piece of yarn or ribbon.



Clay portrait samples. Photo Credit: Gretchen Jeane

Allow clay to dry as directed. Paint and seal if desired. Thread ribbon through hole to create hanger.