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Sculpting heritage

Cherokee artist Eddie Morrison reflects on relationship with the late Allan Houser

BRITT GREENWOOD



Eddie Morrison's sculptures look like they climbed right out of the earth. They share a likeness with the work of iconic Native sculptor Allan Houser, whose work represented the history and culture of his Chiricahua-Apache tribe. He died in 1994, but his legacy carries on through Native artists like Morrison, who he mentored at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Sante Fe.

Native pride and dignity is a common thread through the work of both Morrison and Houser, but Houser encouraged Morrison to find his own style. Morrison's work reflects his people—the Cherokee tribe—and Native Americans in general, he said.

"A lot of times people perceive us as a downtrodden, beaten, defeated people," Morrison said. "But I know we are still here. Especially the Cherokee Nation, who came over a very tragic Trail of Tears. Look at them today—they have prospered and flourished. I am proud of them for that."

Morrison and more than 150 Native artists will share their talents with thousands of visitors when the ninth annual Cherokee Art Market returns to the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino Oct. 11-12. Although bright lights and slot machines feel a world away from the arts, the market—which seeks to preserve and promote Cherokee heritage—draws some of the top Native artists in the country. The show has grown from humble beginnings in the casino parking lot into a highly anticipated attraction for collectors and artists like Morrison.

Morrison's work doesn't fit well under a specific label, so he calls it "contemporary-traditional." He follows the natural lines of the stone and incorporates existing fossils into his limestone pieces.

“Sometimes you just have to let the material speak for itself,” he said. “I got that from Allan Houser.”

The late sculptor’s influence on Morrison transcends their craft.

“Outside of being a great artist, the man himself—he was just a great man,” Morrison said. “Just to listen to him talk, his philosophies about life, his respect for life and all that is around us. Really, it just kind of moved me.”

By celebrating those who have gone before him, Morrison has built his own legacy. In August, he was named a Cherokee National Living Treasure—a title honoring those who have dedicated themselves to protecting the culture of the Cherokee for future generations.

Although the recent Santa Fe Indian Market depleted Morrison’s inventory, he will have about 15 pieces for sale at the show.

CHEROKEE ART MARKET

Oct. 11-12; 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, Sequoyah Event Center

\$5

See Cherokeearmarket.com for information on demonstrations, the awards reception and art auction.

ART HAPPENINGS

ART ON THE SQUARE // Sip a Starbuck’s and grab a Queenie’s sandwich during Utica Square’s annual art walk, which attracts 90 area artists to display and sell their work // 10/4, 10-5 p.m.; 21st Street and Utica Avenue.; 918-742-5531

ART ON MAIN // The Jenks Chamber of Commerce hosts their yearly fall art festival in downtown Jenks // 10/11, 10-5 p.m.; Downtown Jenks, Main Street

TWISTS AND TURNS // The ceramics and tapestries of Israeli artists Aleksandra Stoyanov and Zemer Peled take over 108 Contemporary // through 10/26; 108 Contemporary Gallery; 108 East M.B. Brady Street; 918-895-6302

MOMENTUM TULSA // Presented by Oklahoma Visual Arts Coalition, Momentum celebrates up-and-coming Oklahoma artists under 30 // 10/3 through 10/18; Living Arts Tulsa; 307 East M. B. Brady Street; 918-585-1234