

ART IS CEREMONY.

Art.

For such a small word, it encompasses so much.

Art inspires, entertains and provokes thought. It's beautiful and haunting, made for fun and for learning. For those talented enough to practice it, art is something meaningful for both oneself and others. It's a career.

It's life.

And when we're talking about Indigenous people, art is often the doorway through which non-Natives are introduced to our many varied cultures, values and heritage.

I look at venues like those in Santa Fe and other annual Indian art markets that attract the multitudes, and I am thankful for the conversations I've had with non-Natives about Native-specific issues inherent within the art they purchase. The artist who made the pottery you just bought? She lives in an area of the Southwest where the drinking water is contaminated by uranium. The beautiful woven basket that will adorn your wall? It was made to represent the sky-high rates of domestic violence disproportionately experienced by Native women.

Whether we're talking about the environment, Native youth suicide, police violence or something else, the point is always this: You cannot separate our issues from the art you buy. Even if the artist has no intention of imbuing their work with issue-related meaning, it's still there, under the surface. And, for the most part, I think those who make, buy and appreciate Native art understand this concept.

But art goes deeper than any issue Indian Country might be facing.

In my interactions with thousands of Native artists, I've learned the word *art* isn't one that many tribes traditionally had in their lexicons due to the vastness of its meaning. For more on this, check out the letter that jeweler Kristen Dorsey (Chickasaw) penned for this issue. She makes some great points about what Native art is and isn't.

We Native people have always been artists. From making weapons to clothing to utensils, the stories our elders tell insist that any action worth doing should be completed with artistry—you make it *worth* doing. And not for yourself—always for others. We adorned our homes, our clothing, our bodies and even our battles with meaningful designs and colors



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which signified that life was an important endeavor for which to be present and grateful.

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That's not a new sentiment; nor does it come from me. But it's worth repeating over and over again, because I think many Native artists and consumers of Native art would agree that there's an extra *something* infused within Indigenous artwork. All the Native artists I've ever spoken with say they don't create anything with negative thoughts or bad feelings, because what they put into their art is what goes back out into the world.

And like ceremony, art must be purposeful and intentional or it means nothing.

As you read this issue of *Native Peoples*, I hope you see that the mighty few of us behind the scenes here at the magazine are creating something intentional and purposeful for our readers. I hope you learn something—are inspired by something—and are able to turn around and share it with others.

Mitákuye Oyás'ij.

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