

Shoalwater Bay Tribe celebrates art discovery

Landry's work is on display after COVID-19 delay

BY PATRICK WEBB

An exhibit delayed by the pandemic featuring art by a painter who celebrated the history of the Shoalwater Bay Tribe has opened.

"Eugene Landry. An Artist, a Time and a Tribe" celebrates the work of Landry, who chronicled the lifestyle and personalities of the Shoalwaters at a pivotal time in their history.

The exhibit is open at the Shoalwater Bay Tribal Community Library and Heritage Museum, 4115 State Route 105 in Tokeland, Washington, Tuesdays through Saturdays. It had been set to open in 2020, then delayed because of health and safety concerns.

The 30 oil paintings are the work of Landry, an enrolled Shoalwater Bay member with Hoh and Quileute descent, who was born in 1937.

Exhibit organizers say his paintings tell a powerful story of mid-20th century life on the Shoalwater Bay reservation when the tribe was addressing issues of cultural identity, sovereignty and returning to health.

'Change'

Landry attended Ocosta High School and was a noted athlete.

Paralyzed at 18 from tubercular meningitis, he dedicated his life to perfecting his craft from a wheelchair. He taught himself to paint and draw left handed after another serious injury while being treated at the Cushman Indian Hospital near Tacoma. In later life, as his physical abilities drained, he painted with a brush clamped in his mouth, with family members squeezing paint onto his palette.

Much of his work was lost after his 1988 death.

About three years ago, a collection of about 70 paintings was discovered in a derelict attic in Grayland by Tokeland artist Judith Altruda.

"Despite decades of exposure to dampness, and cold, much of the collection was salvageable," she noted in her blog. She has dedicated herself to restoring his artistic legacy while writing a book about his life. "His paintings are post-impressionistic time capsules of people and places during a period of great change," she wrote.

The project received a 2019 Humanities Washington Storyteller's grant.

'Important'

The Heritage Museum is located on the



Patrick Webb

Judith Altruda displays a painting by Eugene Landry and speaks enthusiastically about his life and legacy. Altruda discovered about 70 paintings in an unheated attic and has worked to share them with members of the Shoalwater Bay Tribe and the arts community.

'Eugene Landry. An Artist, a Time and a Tribe.'

Shoalwater Bay Tribal Community Library and Heritage Museum

4115 State Route 105, Tokeland, Washington

9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Admission free; masks required.

More information: eugenelandry.com or shoalwaterbay-nsn.gov

(360) 267-8130

Video: 'Portrait of Gene — An Artist, a Tribe and a Time' is on YouTube.

former site of Landry's dome-shaped studio. It is only fitting that the art created there 50 years ago is coming home, said Kristine Torset, tribal cultural specialist, announcing the revised schedule after the COVID-19 delay. Torset knew Landry when she was a girl.

"Eugene's art is so much more than just one man's view of the world," said Earl

Davis, cultural director at the Shoalwater Bay museum. "It is an important index point that highlights a turning point in tribal history. During Eugene's time, the people were at a crossroads of struggling and recovery. We have come a long way since then, but it is important to remember the effort that went into getting us here.

"Many of our elders when viewing Eugene's work reflect upon those times and begin sharing those stories with us. I doubt that he ever intended his work to be such important cultural cues, but that's exactly what they have become."

Positive

Altruda, a metalwork artist, is fascinated by Landry's life and legacy. She never tires of telling of her excitement when she discovered the casually wrapped paintings in an old attic then worked to acquire and preserve them.

In an earlier interview about Landry's significance, she noted, "He strove to be artistically recognized. I think he would be happy to know that his art is going to be shared."

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