

METROPOLITAN

Native American art featured



Wesley Thomas, Indian Health Service, and Judith Night, instructor, show a wooden box made by student Michelle Metcalf. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

by Robert Lothian

What better place for a Native American art exhibit than the Federal Building?

Last week, to announce Native American Week, May 25 - 31, the Federal Building hosted "The Art of Chemawa," paintings and other works produced by high school students from Chemawa Indian School in Salem.

The students come to Chemawa from throughout the western United States, said Wesley Thomas, coordinator of the show.

Many tribal groups were represented, including Warm Springs, Oglala Sioux, Hopi-Pueblo, Blackfeet, Athabaskan, Hoopa, Yurok-Karok, Shoshone, Piute, Quinault, Northern Ute and others.

Many of the students' work bore the special stamp of tribal groups — rock mesas and black and white spiritual symbols from the Hopi area of Arizona, for instance, and whales and thunderbirds painted on wood, characteristic of Northwest coast art.

More contemporary paintings included an abstract watercolor, "Weichpec Village," by Tina Webster from Klamath, California, and "Parking Lot," with islands of trees surrounded by what looks grey water but which could also be pavement.

Thomas, coordinator of computer services for Indian Health Services was a counselor at Chemawa for two years. "We really have some good, talented students there," he said.

Native American artists Suzanna Santos, Judy Night, Don Bailey and Marvin Devereaux also had works

represented in the exhibit.

"Third Ring of Fire," a colorful watercolor by Warm Springs artist Santos, provided a unifying theme. In this powerful work, an Aztec dancer is surrounded by dancers dressed in the traditional costumes of Native Americans from Alaska to South America. With eagles and lightning overhead, and a volcano erupting in the background, the dancers wave ears of corn and play flutes and drums as they dance around the sacred fire. The work resonates with color, sound, movement and spiritual power.

Santos, who attended the exhibit opening Monday, said the painting was based on a Hopi prophecy: "Together with all nations we protect both land and life and hold the world in balance," she said.

Santos said she never thought she'd be part of an exhibit at the Federal Building, "because I'm usually on the outside at demonstrations."

Having the show at the Federal Building brought so much needed exposure to Native American artists, she said.

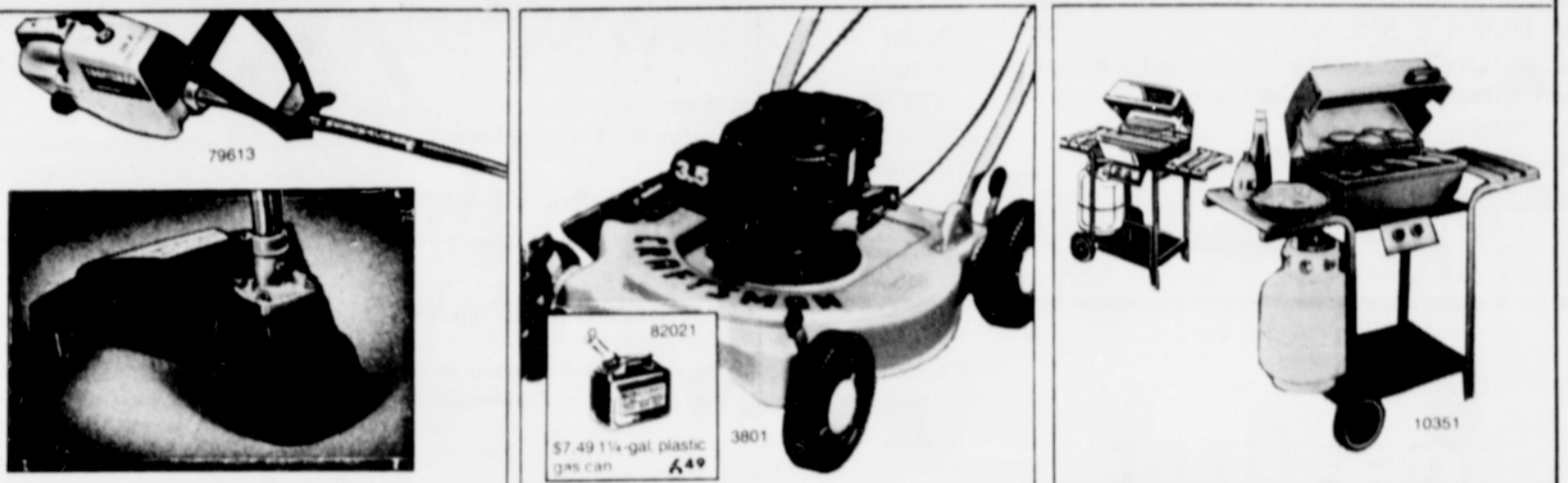
According to Thomas, Native American artists have trouble getting into galleries unless they have corporate connections. "I know that if word gets around people will begin to appreciate the art of minorities in the Northwest," he said, however.

The art works are appropriate for offices and reception areas, said Thomas. "I have a Navajo rug under my desk with a computer sitting on it — a very interesting combination," he said.

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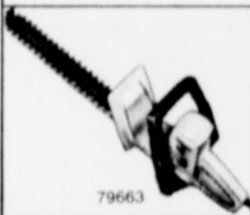
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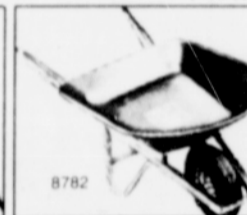


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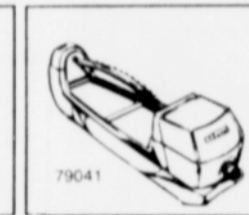
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