

News from Indian Country

Renowned Navajo artist dies

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) - Famed Navajo artist R.C. Gorman, who has been called "the Picasso of Indian art," has died. He was 74.

Gorman, who had been ill with a blood infection and pneumonia, was surrounded by family and friends when he died last Thursday at University of New Mexico Hospital in Albuquerque.

"He never lost touch with his Navajo soul," his sister, Zonnie Gorman, said in a statement released by family spokeswoman Tazbah McCullah.

"He never lost touch with his roots, and that kept him very humble. His soul emanates in his work, whether it was a beautiful scene with mountains and canyons, women or whether it was a simple sketch," his sister said. "Although R.C. the man is no longer with us, his spirit will never die."

Gorman was internationally renowned for paintings and sculptures of graceful female figures, often depicted as generously sized and draped in a blanket.

"I revere women. They are my greatest inspiration," Gorman told The Associated Press in a 1998 interview at his studio north of Taos.

His work was collected by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Andy Warhol, among others.

Gorman was to be buried on land he owned at El Prado near his Taos home, McCullah said.

Gov. Bill Richardson, who announced Gorman's death in a news conference, said: "New Mexico loses a great citizen and the world loses a great artist."

Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley Jr. said Gorman will be sorely missed.

"He contributed greatly to the great name of the Navajo Nation," Shirley said. "He afforded us the opportunity to talk about ourselves to the world. When they took an interest in him, they also took an interest in our nation."

Gorman's work represented an anthology of styles over the years - some featuring Indian rugs, pottery and sand-painting motifs. Some were mystical, surreal.

"His color and his whimsy, the way he celebrated Native American women in particular, and the way he elevated the figures to an art form, really, was tremendous," said New Mexico Cultural Affairs Secretary Stuart Ashman.

He said Gorman will be remembered as "one of the greatest Native American artists." He praised Gorman "not only for the quality of his work but for his contributions toward putting Native American artists into the mainstream of visual artists."

Gene A. Keams, a Navajo and pueblo artist from Albuquerque, said Gorman was a mentor and often shared with him important bits of wisdom about staying true to one's self and taking art seriously.

"He was almost like a father at times," Keams said. "He would take me under his wing and share with me some things only a true friend would get to hear."

Gorman began drawing at age 3. He credited a teacher, Jenny Lind of the Ganado Presbyterian Mission School in Arizona, for starting him as an artist.

"She gave me lessons in art history and different mediums and always encouraged me," he recalled in the AP interview. "I guess she was the most influential teacher that I ever had."

Gorman found his artistic hand, however, while visiting Mexico. He acknowledged strong influences of Tamayo, Orozco, Siqueiros and Diego Rivera.

"It was not only the art and the color and the material they used, but their subject matter came very close to where I came from," he said.

Gorman also relished food, wine and travel. He authored at least four cookbooks, each containing a collection of drawings and paintings, called "Nudes and

Food." He also visited the Louvre and other European museums to see Picassos, van Goghs, DaVincis, El Grecos and Michaelangelos.

"They're all, to me, precious people," Gorman said.

Gorman had been hospitalized about seven weeks. He initially was hospitalized at Holy Cross Hospital in Taos, then was moved Sept. 24 to intensive care in the Albuquerque hospital.

Richardson, who ordered flags around New Mexico flown at half-staff, said Gorman had been on life support for "quite some time."

Gorman's friend and agent, Virginia Dooley, said Gorman became ill at his Taos home after scraping a knee, leading to a bacterial infection in his blood.

Born Rudolph Carl Gorman on July 26, 1931, in Chinle, Ariz., he was known as R.C. throughout his career. He grew up on the Navajo reservation, the son of Navajo Code Talker Carl Gorman, and moved to Taos in 1968.

He is survived by his brother, Don Mitchell of Chinle; and four sisters, Donna Scott of Chinle, Shirley Beecher of Black Mountain, Ariz., Zonnie Gorman of Gallup and Carla Anderson of Kaibeto, Ariz.

Howlak Tichum

Wesley Leslie Charley

Wesley Leslie Charley passed away October 27, 2005. He was 78.

Mr. Charley was born January 7, 1927 at Simnasho to parents Robert Charley and Carrie Johns. He was married to Jane Charley, who preceded him in death.

Mr. Charley was a lifetime resident of Warm Springs. He was a planer man for Warm Springs Forest Products In-

dustries. He also worked for NW Resource, as a fencing boss and a logger.

He is survived by his children: Keith Charley, Robert Charley, Merda Charley, Bonnie Charley, Lilly Charley, Dwayne Charley, and Leslie Squiemphen, all of Warm Springs; sister Gladys Thompson of Warm Springs; 31 grandchildren and numerous great grandchildren.

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Pair study American Indian languages to preserve them

(AP) - Jeremiah Farrow and Linda Sampson are spending at least five hours a day trying to keep an American Indian language alive.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla say only 44 elders among the 2,525 tribal members still speak their three native languages fluently.

The effort to preserve those languages has gotten a boost with grants totaling \$585,000 from the Nathan and Violet David Foundation, the Lannan Foundation and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition to pairing master-apprentice teams, the Nixyaawii School on the reservation teaches students the Umatilla, Cayuse-Nez Perce and Walla Walla tongues.

Farrow and Sampson, both

apprentices, say they are passionate about bringing their native languages back from the brink.

"There are only a handful of speakers left," Farrow said. "To lose it in our generation would be bad."

"It's been the best year of my life, the most enlightened," Sampson said. "It's opened my eyes."

At the end of three years, apprentices may become licensed as language teachers.

Both Farrow and Sampson chose the Walla Walla dialect for study since it's the closest to extinction and the least documented of the three. Other apprentices are studying the other two dialects.

Both Farrow and Sampson gave up their jobs to join the

program. Sampson taught Head Start classes and Farrow worked at the reservation's Tamastlikt Cultural Center running the front desk and working with artifacts.

Farrow has spent seven or eight years trying to learn all three dialects by attending language classes at Tamastlikt and working with master speaker Inez Reeves to learn the Umatilla language.

Reeves, 80, is a short, round woman with a bright smile and an intense desire to see her native languages flourish. She remembers speaking the Umatilla dialect since she and her two brothers were small children.

"There was no English speaking allowed at home," she said. "My mother, father and my aunt talked the Umatilla language, so

we had to learn."

When it came time to raise her own two children, she required them to learn the language as well.

Reeves has tutored three apprentices, including Farrow, for two years. "Jeremiah is a good student," she said.

Sampson hopes the program will spark renewed interest in learning tribal languages, something she believes is crucial. "Every tribe has the same goal - keeping their language going," she said. "You can preserve it, but you've got to transfer it to your kids."

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