

Klamath-Modoc Sculptor Brings Along A New Generation Of Art

■ Jim Jackson has been at it since before high school and has always known that faces are his strength.

By Ron Karten

High above the Columbia River Gorge and back a few miles in the woods of Corbett, Klamath-Modoc sculptor Jim Jackson lives and works with his wife, Teresa, who handles the marketing, including the website and the books, and artist daughter, Jayde, who is now eight and already has been creating art for years.

Jackson is a soft spoken, self-assured man who learned early to stand tall in the Indian-unfriendly environs of Klamath Falls.

While growing up there, Jackson's dad told him to stand up for himself. "I always stood my ground," he said, "and it never really affected me that bad."

Ultimately, though, his dad's advice was "to get out of Klamath Falls."

Like Tribes everywhere, the Klamath Modocs had been abused and decimated. He was born into a Tribe that had been dissolved by the federal government, torn apart by bureaucratic rules designed to do just that, and finally in 1986 restored as a federally recognized Tribe.

It is out of that cauldron that Jackson emerged, and took on a lifelong pursuit of working at art, but also teaching. He teaches about art in ways that also teach about life and about his history and culture.

"What I do as an artist," he said, "I'm teaching about where I come from."

Today, for example, chief among his projects is teaching art to his daughter, Jayde, and her cousins.

"It's interesting to see some of the kids get interested in art because they're so teachable," he said.

"I let them play with the clay," he said. "I encourage them to go in their own direction. I give them techniques for making the eyes, the nose, the mouth. I do cartoonish faces and the kids go crazy for it. They get really involved. Each does his own little character."

Before striking out from Klamath Falls, he enjoyed his first artistic success in a showing of his work at the 803 Gallery. Family support and the success of that first showing led Jackson to continue developing his skills.

His father was "one of my biggest influences. He pushed me into painting and sculptures. He was a perfectionist."

Early on, Jackson made clay people to use as targets for his bb gun. "You couldn't tell if the plastic bullets hit so I made clay people as targets so you could tell," he said.

He made clay pots in high school, but didn't have much interest in the pots. Pretty quickly, he started making faces on the pots, and from there just faces, and he has been on that track ever since.

"The whole idea is the face," he said recently of his work. "I always wanted to get better at the face."

"That's what actually attracted me to his work way

back when," said Steve Fabiani, owner of the Southwest Trading Company, a Geneva, Illinois-based art dealer who has been handling Jackson's work since the 1980s, "his faces. I think his art is so full. It brings the spirit of his people out. His faces show some of the best emotion and character that I've seen in art in his medium."

He now competes at the top Indian showcases in the nation, including the Heard Museum in Phoenix and the Santa Fe Indian Market. Recently, his work was part of the *Nez Perce Art in the Wallows* show and at the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

Also last year, he taught a week long clay residency at the Evergreen State College Longhouse Education and Cultural Center in Olympia, Washington, where he worked alongside digital artist Larry McNeil (Tlingit) and ceramic and bronze artist Lillian Pitt (Warm Springs/Wasco).

A Ford Foundation grant to Evergreen State College funded this project and many others for the college, said Jackson, who used some of his time to "teach kids about (the business side of) our trade." He has learned that "a lot of artists aren't business savvy," he said, so he helps them learn to market themselves and do shows.

You can listen to Lillian Pitt describe how his students succeed under his teaching, or you can look at daughter Jayde's finished pieces to know that her dad has been successful, but you don't even have to look at Jayde's work to realize how far she has come. Her self-confidence shows in the way she describes her work and her interests. She carries the



Photos by Ron Karten

Family Business — Jim Jackson (l to r), daughter Jayde, and wife Teresa all help out with the business. Pictured below is a bronze sculpture by Jackson.

authority of one who has a partnership in the home, who does not tippy-toe around though the home or the shop, though both are filled with priceless originals.

These originals are not yet the prizes of wealth.

"You know artists can't afford their own work," said Teresa, "but Jim trades every place he goes and we have a little remembrance of each show."

Jayde often accompanies Jackson to art shows. "She watched me for years talking to people," he said.

For years now, she has shown her work alongside the work of her dad, and she is more than capable of explaining her art work to potential buyers — "the clay, the firing and everything else," said Jackson.

"He's a very wonderful gentleman," said

Pitt. "Very professional. Very kind and considerate."

The compliments come from many quarters and have been uniform over the years.

"We do everything on a handshake," said Steve Fabiani. "He's very dedicated to his art. He is very, very service oriented to his collectors. He will travel the country to bring a piece to you."

"He's always been very professional, on time, and always very gracious to my customers," added Fabiani. "He's one of the fairest artists I deal with." As a result of his success, he spends a lot of time on the road, and even the road teaches him lessons — in one case about being on time for a show.

He counts his education in marketing as among the toughest parts of developing his career.

Some 30 well-regarded Indian artists make up the core of Jackson's artistic community. He points out who made each piece, sometimes reaching for a name or other examples of what they do. It is a growing community of artists that inhabit the Jackson house — all the pieces infused with meaning, not only from the beauty of the art itself but also from Jackson's on-going personal relationships with the artists. He counts on them for ideas and inspiration, for shop talk and friendship.

"Even being around some of the artists at shows gives you inspiration," he said.

"I have a lot of influences," he said. "What's nice about doing shows, you see hundreds and hundreds of different kinds of artwork."

"I see it in my daughter. She wants to try everything."

Jim's son, Chad, 23, recently returned from a year in Iraq and is stationed in Colorado Springs. Nicole, 22, Teresa's daughter that Jim and Teresa have raised since she was two, is pursuing Native American Studies at Haskell Indian Nations University in Kansas and, according to her mom, is interested in Native social work.

Jackson's work last appeared in January at a wine tasting and art show event called, *Sagebrush Rendezvous*. The *Rendezvous* was held at the Running Y resort in Klamath Falls, and the event raised money for cancer, mental health, and a local grade school. ■

