

A Train With A Different Destination



Artrain USA Tour
Manager Nathan
Zamarron

On Track — These cars, according to Artrain Facility and Rail Manager Chris Talluto, were refurbished 35 years ago when the Artrain started rolling and will last 50 years. The exhibit was billed as "one of the greatest exhibitions of modern Native art."

■ The Artrain Cometh — the Grand Rondes make it possible.

By Ron Karten

"This is just not what people expect," said Artrain USA Tour Manager Nathan Zamarron. The project — contemporary Indian art shown in four railroad cars — attempts to break down stereotypes and build communities.

On Thursday, May 18 in Milwaukie, the 35-year-old Artrain, funded nationally by the National Endowment for the Arts and locally this year by the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, came to town with a four-day show entitled, "Native Views, Influences of Modern Culture: A contemporary Native American Art Exhibition."

At the opening ceremony, Grand Ronde Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl Kennedy said, "We've always been supportive of the arts. When we share, we all have a better society."

This show is "one of the greatest exhibitions of modern Native art," said the Portland Art Museum's Curator of Indian Art Bill Mercer.

"Until the last 15 years," he added, "we never saw the contemporary work of Indians."

"Some (pieces) are not easy to take," he added. "Natives working in a non-Native society — that's tough."

Guest Curator Joanna Osburn Bigfeather (Western Cherokee and Mescalero Apache) reported in the publication accompanying the exhibit that the show offers "mainstream America

an opportunity to understand how much common ground is shared with the First Peoples of North America... The exhibition strives to expose the many misconceptions and stereotypes of Native peoples while encouraging viewers to rethink the construction of a broader American culture."

While showing a group through the train and providing personal stories of artists featured, Mercer tackled the question, "What is art?" He told the story of an 1990 meeting with Native artist Marcus Amerman (Choktaw) years after Amerman's graduation from Madison High School in Portland.

Amerman asked Mercer, who even then was known as a connoisseur of Native American art, what he thought of a beaded wallet Amerman had made. It had the face of Janet Jackson on one side and Paula Abdul on the other.

"I told him, 'Dude, that rocks!' said Mercer, "because that was what interested him at the time. The artists are chroniclers of the time," he added. "Forget the anthropologists. It's the artists, the writers, the singers who give you the best glimpse that you could ever get. And from the best group of artists you could ever get," he said referring to the show, "this is Indian Country."

The show consists of 70 artworks by 53 Native artists representing 45 Tribes, "all alive and working today,"



Photos by Ron Karten

Home For Art — Grand Ronde Tribal Chairwoman Cheryl Kennedy welcomed Artrain enthusiasts to the Grand Ronde homelands and described her view of the value of art in building community.

said Zamarron. It takes the Artrain four years to cover the whole country and this show is now in its third year. Later in the year, the whole train is scheduled to go by ferry to Alaska, said Zamarron.

The artwork itself is divided into three subject areas, each taking a single railcar: one for the influences of popular culture, one for the influences of technology and a third for the influences of Native knowledge. The last car contains artworks and t-shirts and other things for sale, along with more information about the exhibit.

In addition to financial support, the Grand Rondes contributed in other ways. The Coyote Creek Singers drummed and sang, Tribal member Ceecee Kneeland offered a blessing song, Tribal member Nakoosa Moreland represented Grand Ronde Royalty, and the Grand Ronde Honor Guard presented the colors.

"We would not be here without our real hosts," said Milwaukie Councilwoman Carlotta Collette, "the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde. This takes place in their homeland."

In addition, the musical group Cedar Rose, with Nico Wind and Karen Kitchen, were joined by Tribal mem-

ber Miguel Adams, 5, son of Tribal member Lisa Archuleta and nephew of Tribal member Greg Archuleta, for a few songs.

Among the many dignitaries in attendance were State Senate Majority Leader Kate Brown and Clackamas Community College President Joe Johnson.

Artrain fellowships are available for people interested in traveling with the show for five months. Contact Zamarron at Nathan.Zamarron@ArtrainUSA.org for more information.

The whole show came together in about two weeks, said Zamarron. Milwaukie officials working with the Grand Rondes and other local businesses and groups pulled together all the details, including location, \$15,000-20,000 in local contributions (representing only about one-fifth of the full cost), an advertising campaign and the details of the event itself. Artrain and local communities usually spend almost a year putting such a visit together. The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde came through with \$10,000, the lion's share of the necessary local contribution, in just a few days. ■



Grand Ronde
Honor Guard
and the Coyote
Creek Singers