



Seeing Through the Eyes of an Artist

Roxanne Swentzell, from Santa Clara Pueblo in northern New Mexico, is a highly accomplished artist who specializes in sculpting human figures out of clay. Her work has been exhibited in galleries and museums around the world. A farmer as well as an artist, Roxanne co-founded and helps to operate the nonprofit Flowering Tree Permaculture Institute, which experiments with sustainable living systems. The Museum recently acquired one of Roxanne's clay sculptures, entitled "Nestled Lives." She says:

"I made this piece during the spring, at the time of the Los Alamos fires. I could see the land near my home burning. When I made it, I was thinking that humans, especially women, are like vessels. For Pueblo people, earth is our mother—earth itself is seen like a bowl. Nesting bowls are seen as a sign sort of like generations—the earth holds all of us, nestled within."

"With my sculptures I try to reach people's emotions so they can remember themselves. Mostly I create human figures out of clay. Using gestures and expressions, I try to bring these little people to life—to communicate with people in a way other than words."



"Nestled Lives" by Roxanne Swentzell of Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico (Tewa), 2000.

UPM 2000-19-1, H: 35.8 cm

"Everything we do has to be sacred. It doesn't matter if you're baking bread or making a sculpture—or walking, it's got to be done in the same manner. It's got to be done with love for yourself. There is a kind of spirit and belief in us when we do a rain dance, for example. We dance knowing we are part of this whole world—or else we wouldn't believe we can help make it rain. It is believing in ourselves that enables us to be connected to this earth, and in so doing we have tremendous power."

"If we see through our eyes then whatever we are will come out. And that means whether I am an Indian or not. It doesn't really matter. What matters is that whatever appears from within us is true. I learned to listen to myself and not to be so influenced by what other people wanted me to make. I am going to present the world through my eyes—and not as somebody told me I was supposed to."

Lucy Williams

Keeper, American Section Collections

Excerpts taken from an interview with the artist in September 2000 and from an essay written by her entitled "Hearing with Our Hearts" in Lois Crozier-Hogle and Darryl Babe Wilson, Surviving in Two Worlds: Contemporary Native American Voices (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).