

HYPERALLERGIC

Rose B. Simpson: "Meet the Art Community of the US Southwest: Rose B. Simpson Believes Culture Is for "Conscious Nurturing"

Written by Ellie Duke

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Rose B. Simpson in her studio (courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery)

Rose B. Simpson is a mixed-media artist from Santa Clara Pueblo, NM. Her work engages ceramic sculpture, metals, fashion, performance, music, installation, writing, and custom cars. She received an MFA in Ceramics from Rhode Island School of Design in 2011, an MFA in Creative Non-Fiction from the Institute of American Indian Arts in 2018, is collected in museums across the continent, and has exhibited internationally. She lives and works from her home at Santa Clara Pueblo, and hopes to teach her young daughter how to creatively engage the world.

How long have you been in Santa Clara Pueblo/New Mexico?

My ancestry dates back thousands of years to the area. I was raised at the Pueblo and after my first graduate degree, returned to live and raise my daughter. As my spirituality is heuristic, I have to be in place to practice.

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What is the first strong memory you have of art?

My mother supported her family with her ceramic sculpture. So I remember watching her work from when I was still crawling. She was always telling me not to touch her work. I wanted to “help her” so bad. I don’t think I was aware that there was any difference between “art” and “life.”

What are you questioning through your practice right now?

I’m always tossing around the idea that for an art practice, we take resources from the earth, and my hope is that the works that are made make systemic change to benefit the planet. Right now I’m working on building awareness around the energy of colonization, around indigenous culture, bodies, and place.



(Courtesy the artist and Jessica Silverman Gallery)

What challenges do you face as an artist in the Southwest, New Mexico, or Santa Clara Pueblo?

Recently, I’ve had opportunities to show my work more extensively beyond Santa Fe and the Indian Art Market sphere. Juxtaposing those experiences, I can see how patronizing and disrespectful a small market like the one in the Southwest can be.

What is the most impactful or memorable art experience you've had in the last year?

In June of 2019 I got to participate in a group show at Jessica Silverman Gallery in San Francisco. It was the beginning of my representation by JSG, and a really amazing friendship with both Jessica Silverman and her partner, Sarah Thornton. I was given a solo show in the Fall of 2019, a show that pushed my creative process in some of the most vulnerable and exploratory ways. I fell back in love with my studio process.

When you are working a project do you have a specific audience in mind?

My work is intended to translate our humanity back to ourselves. I hope that I can educate some people on issues of unconsciousness around race, gender, and history, and I hope to honor lived experiences of those who have suffered Post Colonial Stress Disorder.

What questions do you feel aren't being asked of or by creative people in your community?

I think that we lack the capacity for healthy critical dialogue. Art is a powerful medium, and because of the economic importance of it for so many, I've found it difficult to critique or have challenging conversations around our creative intentionality.

How do you engage with and consume culture?

I don't think culture is for our consumption. I believe culture is for conscious nurturing. As someone who was initially equipped with a cultural identity, it is frustrating to see people use cultures that are not their own (especially Indigenous culture and lifeways) for their own benefit.

What are you currently working on?

I am at Anderson Ranch for an arts residency to finish work for a show at Jack Schainman's School at Kinderhook, curated by Helen Molesworth. Because the exhibition is going to be located at an abandoned and re-appropriated schoolhouse, I've been delving into the history of Western Education and Indigenous Boarding Schools as a genocidal tool in the war against indigenous culture. As someone who attended Indian Boarding School myself, this subject is very sensitive and I am very dedicated to this work.

Who in your community of artists, curators, archivists, organizers, directors, etc. is inspiring you right now?

I have wonderful conversations with some of my peers, artists that I respect immensely, including Dyani White-Hawk and Razelle Benally. Working with Jessica Silverman has been one of the most inspiring new forces in my life. Helen Molesworth and Susan Dackerman are people that I admire immensely, it is so good to have queer leaders making space in our global conversations. Tony Pandola is writing a book and our conversations seem to radicalize every energetic and philosophical apocalypse. Jamie Okuma, Cannupa Hanska Luger, Vanessa German, Nep Sidhu are some artists I look to for inspiration and energy.

Where are the centers for creative community in your region?

I am most connected to two very important creative machines: the Institute of American Indian Arts and the New Mexico School for the Arts. I believe that centers for critical creativity are the lifeblood of a very tenuous environmental and political future.