

ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL



Rose B. Simpson "Two NM artists awarded Joan Mitchell Foundation Fellowships"

By Kathleen Roberts

October 24, 2021



"The Remembering," Rose B. Simpson, 2020, ceramic, metal, wood sticks and leather.

The innovations of Luis Tapia and Rose B. Simpson take on traditions with a contemporary twist.

Both New Mexico artists are the recent winners of \$60,000 Joan Mitchell Foundation Fellowships.

The Santa Clara Pueblo-based Simpson and Santa Fe resident Tapia are two of 15 artists chosen nationally for the unrestricted award. According to the foundation, they were picked from 166 applicants from across the U.S.

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For mixed-media artist Simpson, the nod caps years of applying for multiple fellowships. Her artwork investigates the complex issues of past, present and humanity's tenuous survival in our current ecological condition.

Simpson learned about the fellowship in a phone call from the foundation.



Rose B. Simpson

"I was shocked," she said in a telephone interview from Santa Clara Pueblo, "because I thought applications were like gambling. I said, 'Are you for real?' "

The foundation will distribute the money incrementally over five years.

"Any kind of predictable income is an incredible feeling," Simpson said.

Simpson is best known for her sculptural work "Maria," a 1985 Chevy El Camino painted in San Ildefonso black-on-black in tribute to the legendary potter Maria Martinez. From 2019-2020 it traveled nationally with the exhibition "Hearts of Our People."

Simpson studied auto body at work at Northern New Mexico College after earning her master's in fine arts degree at Rhode Island School of Design. She wanted to learn how to build low riders.

"Car culture in northern New Mexico and Española is the aesthetics of the every day," she said. "This one was totally beat up. I found her on the side of the road in Nambé."

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Her figural sculpture "The Remembering," (2020) emerged from her reflections on the abuses at Indian boarding schools. Simpson wrapped a trio of identical figures in fabric.

"They're very cocoon-like," she said. "They're wrapped in cocoons or blankets. There's a sense of remembering the children who were taken and remembering that's how they survived."



Luis Tapia

Tapia is a self-taught artist best known for his innovative wood carvings blending the Hispanic bulto tradition with contemporary culture.

He had heard someone had nominated him for the fellowship.

"I came home one day and there was a message on the phone," he said. "I had totally forgotten about the application. The nomination in itself was an honor."

According to Kay Takeda, deputy director of the foundation's artistic programs, the jury wanted to honor Tapia's longevity and his practice of building dialogue around his art. He has been working for more than 40 years.

Tapia's "Trump Day Care," (2020) is a carved and painted wood sculpture of children locked in a prison cell.



"Broken Promises," Luis Tapia, 2017, carved and painted wood, 33 by 8 by 7-3/4 in.

"It's really a sad thing because all the Mexican kids taken from the border and taken from their families," he said. "These are infants and small children, and their whole life beginning is incarceration for nothing."

"I had promised myself I was never going to connect my name with his," Tapia continued. "But then I had to say something."

"Broken Promises" (2017) continues the theme, with the Statue of Liberty's skeletal arm raised above the countless faces of immigrants.

"All the people painted on the Statue of Liberty are the people who built the Statue of Liberty," Tapia said. "But again, they shut the doors on all the beautiful people. Even the statue; she's dying." Tapia's work can be found in the Albuquerque Museum, the Autry Museum of the American West, the Denver Art Museum, New York's American Folk Art Museum, the Heard Museum in Phoenix and more.

Simpson's work has appeared at SITE Santa Fe, the Heard Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, the National Museum of the American Indian and the Denver Art Museum.

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"Trump Day Care," Luis Tapia, 2020, carved and painted wood, 15 by 13-a3/4 in.



"Maria," Rose B. Simpson, 2014, 1985 Chevy El Camino and post-apocalyptic Indigenous warrior accoutrements out of leather, metal, found objects and ceramic components.

Joan Mitchell was an artist whose career spanned more than four decades, from her first professional solo exhibition in New York in 1952 until her death in France in 1992.

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