

Outsiders Within

Randy Kemp is a Native American artist. He was born in Los Angeles, and he grew up in Sapulpa, Okla. He currently lives in Phoenix. Randy is a member of the Euchee, Muscogee and Choctaw tribes. The Muscogee people also are called the Creeks. Randy is from the Turtle Clan of the Muscogee Nation. All of these tribes are from the Southeastern Woodlands region of the United States.

Many years ago, around the time of the Civil War, the tribes who lived in the southeastern United States were forced to leave their homelands. They were moved to a place called the Indian Territory. This Territory is now the state of Oklahoma. This displacement was called “The Trail of Tears.” Members of Randy’s tribes including his own ancestors were forced to make this move. They walked many miles and people died along the way. During the confusion of the move, many traditions were lost and families separated. The people who survived kept some of the knowledge alive.

Randy follows several of the traditions of the Southeastern Woodlands people. He always tries to dance in the annual Green Corn Dance and he sings traditional songs. Randy honors the old ways of his people and he enjoys his life in the modern world. Randy finds that some people who are not familiar with Native Americans believe that all Indian people live in teepees. Randy uses his artwork to spread the message that Native American people are alive today. He wants everyone to learn that Indian people live in houses and apartments. They are living in large cities, not just reservations. Randy wants his artwork to make people think about how Native American people can honor their traditions and still do things like work with computers and listen to iPods.

Randy learned how to draw from his older brother. “As a teen I watched my older brother, Fagan, make artwork. He taught me line drawing, half-tone shading and landscape perspectives.” Later, Randy went to college. He studied art with several famous Native American artists in Oklahoma and Arizona. Randy sees himself as an outsider in Arizona because he is not a member of any of the tribes that are based here. However, he sees himself as an insider because he has plenty to share with other people through his art.

Comments about Randy Kemp’s Work

Andrea Hanley, The Berlin Gallery at the Heard Museum

“Kemp is a noted multi-disciplinary artist in the contemporary American Indian art world. Kemp’s body of work includes painting, printmaking, installation, music and performance. Kemp is able to achieve and express a seamless balance of his beliefs and experiences as a contemporary urban artist and Indigenous person. He sometimes humorously juxtaposes visual layers which challenge viewers to reflect on multiple levels of culture. Kemp’s work successfully explores both tradition and modern expression, and often appears to be very contemporary; however, he does create elements that hold special, specific or serious meaning to his tribes.”