

News Release: PONCA CHIEF PORTRAITS displayed in Nebraska Capitol Rotunda

In commemoration of Standing Bear Day, an exhibit of ten portraits of Ponca chiefs by Janice Rockwell will be on display in the Capitol Rotunda in Lincoln. The exhibit is sponsored by the Nebraska Commission of Indian Affairs. Standing Bear is among the ten chiefs who are represented in the exhibit. In a time when Indian Wars were fought in the West, the Ponca tribe attempted to settle their quarrels with the government through peaceful treaties and by appealing to the humanity of people. A researched dialog accompanies the art work telling some of their story, culture, and the Ponca contribution to Native American civil rights.

The individual portraits are based on the group photograph, "Ponca Delegation to Washington, D.C.". This photo, included in the exhibit by permission of the Nebraska State Historical Society, is attributed to William Henry Jackson. The photograph was taken in 1877 when the tribal leaders and their interpreters were taken to D.C. to protest the Ponca's forced relocation to Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

Collage is used throughout the Ponca chief portraits. Mixed-media and water-based paint are brushed or stained on various papers and fibers. A variety of approaches are taken to express each man's individual character and personality. Skin is textured and lightened to give a spiritual, other-worldly appearance. Many of the items used in the portraits are from throw-away materials that have been reworked; i.e. egg cartons and packing cardboard. The notion of "throw-away" expresses the attitude towards Native Americans taken by whites at times in our nation's history.

Several of the portraits of the chiefs are placed in front of landscapes. This expresses the fact that the Ponca were tied as a people to their land. They were born there, their ancestors were buried there and their daily lives were entwined with the hunting grounds, plant gathering and farmlands. Among Native Americans, "Green" was an ancient way of life not a new idea.

Rockwell is a professional artist living in the wooded rolling hills and corn fields of west-central Illinois. She is a former educator and Illinois Department of Natural Resources State Artisan who works from her rural home studio. More of her work can be viewed at www.earthairwater.com. Rockwell exhibits at various mid-west venues including the Illinois State Museum shops. She studied art at the University of Illinois and graduated from Western Illinois University, where she holds degrees in Art Education and School Counseling.

The stylized representations by Rockwell are her interpretations of the men in the tintype photograph. She attempts to express, with deep respect and admiration, the pride and dignity of each chief in the group. It is her intent to honor each man's spirit as she shares a bit of their story and history of their tribe.

The portraits were recently completed after three years of work. They initially were displayed this spring at the Little Priest Tribal College in Winnebago, Nebraska. The Capitol exhibit will be opened to the public from April 28th to May 9th, during regular business hours. For more information, contact Capital Tourism at the Office of the Capitol Commission (402/471-6691). After Lincoln, the exhibit will be shown at Dickson Mounds State Museum in Illinois.