

[MAIN Title wall]

The Art of Judith Lowry

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[main text]

The Art of Judith Lowry

Judith Lowry (born 1948, Washington, D.C.) is an artist of Mountain Maidu, Pit River, Washoe, and Euro-Australian descent. She is known for her vibrant, large-scale paintings that weave together the legends, traditions, and complexities of her Indigenous ancestry. She views her artwork as a modern extension of storytelling, stating once: "There is one distinction I have to make. I am not a painter. I am a storyteller who uses paint to bring my Tribe's stories to life." These stories unfold in her ancestral homelands—near Greenville, Susanville, and Honey Lake Valley in California's northern Sierra Nevada, and on the western edge of the Great Basin, just north of Reno, Nevada.

Lowry's father, Leonard Lowry was a decorated U.S. Army officer who met his future wife Shirley Harrison while stationed in Sydney, Australia. The couple raised their family—which included Judith and her brother Sonny—abroad. While living and traveling in Europe, Japan, and the United States, they were exposed to diverse cultural experiences and visited many art museums. This is where Lowry developed her early affinity for fine art, which later influenced her own stylistic approach to artmaking. She later settled on the West Coast, earning a B.A. in fine art from Humboldt State University, and a M.A. in painting and drawing from Chico State University. In 1996, Lowry moved to Nevada City, California, where she flourished as an artist and co-founded the California Heritage Indigenous Research Project (CHIRP). This initiative aimed to document and share the stories of the Nisenan people of present-day Northern California, emphasizing overlooked narratives of Native resilience and survival. In 2023, Lowry returned to her family's homelands in Susanville, California, where she now lives and works.

Lowry is an enrolled member of the federally recognized Pit River Tribe. Her paintings are included in major museum collections across the United States, including the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, the Peabody Essex Museum, the Crocker Art Museum, the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, the Denver Art Museum, and the Nevada Museum of Art.

This exhibition is co-curated by Melissa Melero-Moose (Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe) and Ann M. Wolfe, the Museum's Andrea and John C. Deane Family Chief Curator and Associate Director.

[secondary text panel]

Lowry & Croul Collection of Contemporary Native American Art

The Lowry & Croul Collection of Contemporary Native American Art represents a decades-long effort by Judith Lowry and her husband, Brad Croul, to elevate and support Native American artists, particularly those from Northern California and the Great Basin. The collection spans a range of media, including painting, sculpture, photography, and jewelry—with a focus on works by artists from what Lowry describes as the “first wave” of Native California “modern” art. Lowry began collecting in the 1990s, when she was an art student at Humboldt State University, and over time, built a collection that speaks to both her personal connection to these artists and her desire to amplify Indigenous voices.

Lowry’s approach to collecting was deeply personal and often informal. With a modest budget, some acquisitions were made through trades with friends, while others were chosen because they resonated with her as a storyteller. As Lowry reflects, the art she selected was not based on anthropological narratives, but on personal stories that reflect contemporary Native experiences. “I like to be inspired,” she says, “and I marvel sometimes at art and artists. Sometimes I can’t imagine myself doing it, but say, ‘wow,’ that’s something.” This collection is a celebration of the stories that matter most to Lowry—those that come from her cultural heritage and speak to the present-day experiences of Native communities.

Through the donation of her collection to the Nevada Museum of Art in 2024, Lowry hopes to share these important works with a wider audience, particularly in a museum located near her ancestral homelands. The Lowry & Croul Collection stands as a testament to the strength and creativity of Indigenous artists and serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving and honoring these stories.

All of the artworks in this gallery are from the the Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art, Gift of Judith Lowry and John B. Croul.

[table case—extended label]

The Lowry Archive Collection of Cultural Ephemera

From sports team mascots to food products, Native American imagery continues to be a prominent and often contentious part of American culture. Artist Judith Lowry has spent years collecting merchandising labels and kitsch memorabilia that reflect stereotypical depictions of Indigenous peoples. Her collection includes figurines, movie posters, product labels, and more—items that illustrate how Native American imagery has been commodified in American history and pop culture.

Lowry's collection, which she describes as "kitsch," offers insight into an era when it was socially acceptable to exploit cultures for commercial gain. Despite the offensive nature of many pieces, Lowry uses humor to explore these complex issues. "It can hurt people," Lowry notes regarding the materials. "Especially at a time when Indigenous voices were marginalized. However, Indigenous peoples have become more articulate, vocal, and educated, and now they can advocate for themselves. As an educated Indigenous person, I present this collection to offer a lighthearted perspective on a serious topic. I hope to provoke thought while also encouraging enjoyment," she states.

The Lowry Archive Collection of Cultural Ephemera, comprised of hundreds of items, is housed at the Institute for Art + Environment at the Nevada Museum of Art and is available for research and study.

[table case—extended label]

Home to Medicine Mountain

A children's book illustrated by Judith Lowry and written by Chiori Santiago

Originally published by Lee & Low Books, 1998

In this book, two young Native American brothers are separated from their family and sent to live in a government-run Indian residential school in the 1930s. This is an experience shared by generations of Native American children throughout North America. At these schools, children were forbidden to speak their Native languages and made to unlearn their “Indian ways.” Sadly, they were often not allowed to return home to their families. Native American artist Judith Lowry based this story on the experiences of her father Leonard Lowry and her Uncle Stanley Lowry. Judith and author Chiori Santiago tenderly relate how Stanley and Benny Len found their way home by train one summer. Inspired by their dreams of home and the memories of their grandmother’s stories, the boys embark on an adventurous journey from the harsh residential school to their triumphant welcome home in Susanville, California, in the shadow of You-Tim Yamne (Medicine Mountain).

