

Art Spotlight

CREATIVITY FROM THE CREATOR

An Interview with Eastern Shoshone artist Joanne Brings Thunder

Bishop Paul-Gordon Chandler had the opportunity to interview Eastern Shoshone contemporary artist Joanne Brings Thunder, who is a participating artist in our GROUNDED exhibition.



Joanne Brings Thunder is an enrolled member of the Eastern Shoshone Tribe on the Wind River Indian Reservation of Wyoming. She is a multi-faceted artist and award-winning architect who was introduced to Northern Plains Indian Art at age five. As Joanne's creativity and talent were being revealed in inventive drawings and beadwork, her grandmother, renowned Shoshone regalia maker, Eva McAdams (1996 NEA National Heritage Fellow), encouraged the emerging artist to master her drawings, beadwork and creativity.

Joanne's love for art, and all it has to offer, has grown and advanced with her throughout the years, bringing her artistic style and creativity to where it is today. This Shoshone artist has risen to painting on canvas, ledger paper, parfleche and hides. She has skillfully developed her traditional and contemporary styles of American Indian art and crafted jewelry, textiles, fashion and home décor. Each piece is created intentionally with thoughtful patience, authenticity and pride, integrating ancestral legend, symbolism and history. Joanne currently lives and works on the Ft. Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota. For more information, see: jbringsthunder.com

“ The earth is sacred, part of a ‘web of creation.’ ”

JOANNE BRINGS THUNDER

When did you start creating art and know it would become your life's calling?

My earliest memory of creating art (beadwork) was with my grandmother at a very young age. I made my first pair of moccasins when I was 6 years old. She, by far, has been my biggest influence and supporter.

What formative influences have shaped your life as an artist?

My art is a direct result of the influence of my Shoshone culture and my family - the two integral facets of who I am and how I express myself. My family and culture are at my core and who I am. I'm blessed to know who I am and where I come from.

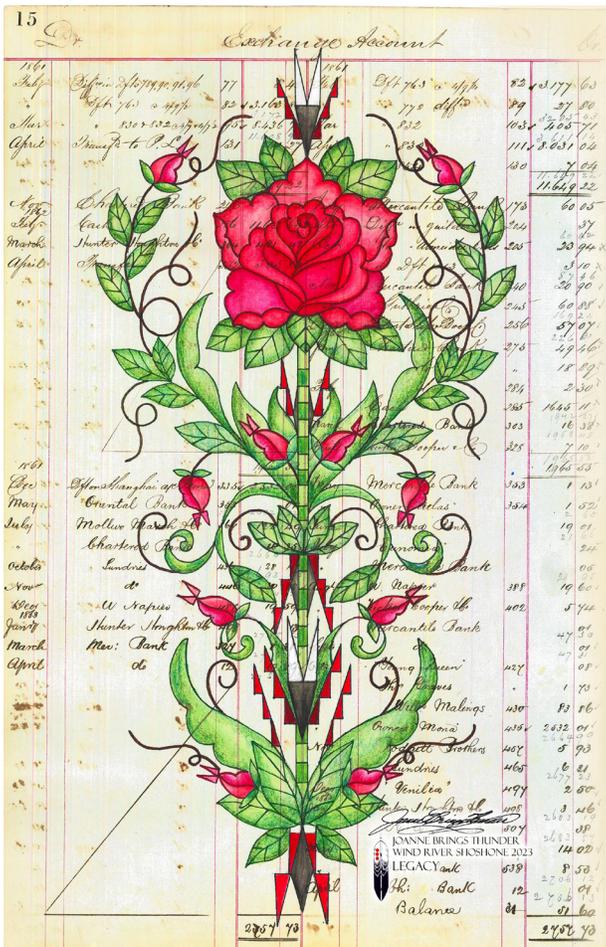


Wash

<i>Gr</i>		<i>Wash</i>		<i>Gr</i>
1870				
Sept	Balance	135 79	Oct	Sundries
Oct		10533 71	Nov	do
		3,138 43	Dec	do
		407 33	1861	do
Nov		18,424 23	Jan	do
		250 44	Feb	do
Dec		8550 211	Mar	do
1861		33,607 00	Apr	do
Jan		11,344 92	May	do
Feb		24,057 92	June	do
Mar		20,350 20	July	do
		1,000 00	Aug	do
Apr		12,650 00	Sept	do
		78,500 00	Oct	do
May	Balance	7,000 00	Nov	do
	Sundries	141 00	Dec	do
		14,200 00	1862	do
June		155 00	Jan	do
July		170 00	Feb	do
Aug		186 00	March	do
Sept		20 00	April	do
Oct		20 00	May	do
Nov	Balance	143 00	June	do
	Sundries	156 00	July	do
		171 00	Aug	do
Dec		187 00	Sept	do
1862		200 00	Oct	do
Jan		219 00	Nov	do
Feb		242 00	Dec	do
March		261 00	1863	do
April		266 00	Jan	do
May		286 00	Feb	do
June		288 00	March	do
July		316 00	April	do
Aug		354 00	May	do
Sept		12,692 87	June	do
Oct		12,944 39	July	do
Nov		17,414 09	Aug	do
Dec		18,163 30	Sept	do
1863		7,901 9	Oct	do
Jan		9,440 13	Nov	do
Feb		24,419 38	Dec	do
Mar		16,055 65	1864	do
		120,234 44	Jan	do
		9,982 96	Feb	do
		15,490 13	March	do
		9,785 64	April	do
		16,149 07	May	do
		161,493 07	June	do
		161,493 07	July	do
		161,493 07	Aug	do
		161,493 07	Sept	do
		161,493 07	Oct	do
		161,493 07	Nov	do
		161,493 07	Dec	do
		161,493 07	1865	do
		161,493 07	Jan	do
		161,493 07	Feb	do
		161,493 07	March	do
		161,493 07	April	do
		161,493 07	May	do
		161,493 07	June	do
		161,493 07	July	do
		161,493 07	Aug	do
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		161,493 07	July	do
		161,493 07	Aug	do
		161,493 07	Sept	do
		161,493 07	Oct	do
		161,493 07	Nov	do
		161,493 07	Dec	do
		161,493 07	1867	do
		161,493 07	Jan	do
		161,493 07	Feb	do
		161,493 07	March	do
		161,493 07	April	do
		161,493 07	May	do
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		161,493 07	Dec	do
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		161,493 07	Dec	do
		161,493 07	1869	do
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Forward

Deer Woman, Acrylic paint, ink, colored pencil on antique ledger paper, 11" x 17"



Legacy Shoshone Rose,
Acrylic paint, ink, colored pencil on antique ledger paper
11" x 17"

Art serves many roles, what do you see as its greatest value?

My ancestors saw art as a valuable tool to assist in storytelling. Our families' patterns and colors are still used today in our regalia. Many people can tell which family you belong to by those colors and designs. Even today, it is a marker for identity within our tribe, clans, and family systems.

Is there an overall theme that your work expresses, and if so, can you share that with us?

My overall theme would have to be telling our women's stories and recognizing our traditional matriarchal roles within Shoshone culture.

Some of your work uniquely blends the contemporary with what is referred to traditionally as Ledger Art. Can you share with us more specifically about your artwork, including distinct elements in the composition in your work?

My ledger art is a contemporary story about women and our strength and resilience as indigenous women. We are the backbone of our nations; we are the life givers. Although most traditional ledger art is depicting our warriors, as a female ledger artist my primary focus is telling our stories from a woman's perspective. We have our stories too and they need to be told. My greatest delight is when our young girls ask me who that is in my art, and I tell them that is "YOU." The smile and confidence are all I need to keep creating. Regarding the distinct elements in the composition of my works, they are no doubt influenced by my technical training as an architect. I greatly admire the small details and balance of composition. I think my art reflects both.





Ribbon Skirt

What do you feel Native Americans can offer our world today in regard to our connection to the earth and being in harmony everything upon it?

I can't speak for all Native Americans, but I can say that we have numerous gifts that allow many of us to live and represent our connection to the earth. An aspect that I think everyone, regardless of race, could benefit from, is that climate change is real and must be addressed. I guess that comes down to respect and facing our own authenticity, because soon the earth is going to correct all of humanity's wrongdoing and unfortunately many of us will perish as a result.

Can you share with us why you are excited about participating in the GROUNDED exhibition?

I'm excited to be a part of the exhibition because it gives my art and my people a voice. A voice that comes directly from us and our perspective of life, while reminding the rest of the world that we are still here.

Can you share with us what projects you are currently working on?

I'm currently working on a ledger piece that honors our war bonnet and chokecherry dances.



Deer Woman Scarf