



State of the Arts

This year's Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts honors David Bradley, whose *Indian Country* exhibition recently graced the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture.

BY TRICIA WARE

There are three stages of looking at a David Bradley painting. First, you see the vibrant color and detailed images of a New Mexico scene. Often, it's a familiar one, such as people gathered around the dining room table of an adobe house in *Pueblo Feast Day*. Looking more closely, you take in the humor and creative juxtaposition. Here, guests include the Lone Ranger (sitting next to Clark Kent) and, across the table, a biker in a Hell's Angels vest. A bowler-hatted René Magritte stands in the corner, next to a poster that says BLUE RAIN GALLERY, which represents Bradley's work. Is that Bradley's wife, Jemez Pueblo potter Arlene Loretto, wearing traditional Pueblo dress and serving bread? Looking more closely still, you feel the sucker punch, the undeniable, uncomfortable truth. Sometimes it's funny, sometimes not. In *Pueblo Feast Day*, a crowd of what looks like uninvited guests gawks through the picture window behind the table, reflecting that with the commodification of Native culture, even the simplest tradition has become a spectacle—something continuously overshadowed by the gaze of those on the outside, looking in.

The headline of a newspaper resting on the dinner table reads, ALS CURE FOUND. It's not a coincidence. Bradley was diagnosed with ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, three years ago.

"I could write a book about what it is like to be told you have a short time to live and that you will slowly become paralyzed before you die," Bradley related via email, because the disease has progressed to the point that it is arduous for him to speak, impossible to sculpt, and difficult to paint. "More recently I have been experimenting with pouring paint with no brushes or other tools to control it. This way of working really frees you up and is very satisfying." At the same time, he said, "As my illness has progressed, even pouring paint becomes very difficult."

A member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Bradley grew up in California, did a stint with the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, then arrived in Santa Fe in the late 1970s to attend the Institute of American Indian Arts. The city has been his home ever since.

"Santa Fe had a special magic for me in those days," he said. "Part of what kept me here was the Santa Fe Indian Market, the whole incredible art scene, and the fact that I could hang out with hundreds of other Indians and artists, most of whom were affiliated with IAIA at one time or another. And of course, there were thousands of Pueblo Indians living within an hour of Santa Fe. Many of them were famous jewelers or potters like Maria Martinez. Besides immediately falling in love with Santa Fe, the beautiful, dramatic landscapes of northern New Mexico blew my mind. They still do."

While much Native art is about preserving tradition, Bradley's incorporates many cross-cultural influences while remaining distinctively Native in subject matter. The artist says that during his Peace Corps years, he was greatly inspired by the color and expressiveness of Haitian folk art, which kindled his love of folk art across cultures.

"After I became a student, one of my favorite classes was art history, especially the topics of the folk artists of Europe, like Henri Rousseau, but also the folk arts of Native peoples from around the world," he recalls. "Picasso also spent much of his career creating works influenced by African folk art."

Opposite: David Bradley, *Pueblo Feast Day 1984/2014, Full Circle*, 2015. Mixed media, 40 x 60 in. Collection of the artist. Photograph by Blair Clark.

2016 GOVERNOR'S AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE ARTS

NICHOLAS HERRERA

Artist ♦ El Rito

Recognized for: Reinterpreting traditional *bultos* and *retablos* to depict saints (and sinners) in ways that are edgy, satirical, and socially conscious.

ELODIE HOLMES

Artist ♦ Santa Fe

Recognized for: Being the glassblower, mentor, educator, and businesswoman behind Liquid Light Glass, and one of the founders of the Baca Street Arts District.

FELIX LÓPEZ

Artist ♦ Española

Recognized for: Carving *bultos* that radiate spirituality and are found in places of worship across New Mexico and around the world.

JIM VOGEL

Artist ♦ Dixon

Recognized for: Illustrating New Mexico folklore, myth, and magic in his epic paintings; and donating 100 giclée editions of *La Resurrección* to raise money for Albuquerque's National Institute of Flamenco when they lost their facility in a tragic fire.

DR. RAMAKRISHNA AND AMMU DEVASTHALI
Major Contributors to the Arts ♦ Las Cruces

Recognized for: Establishing the Devasthali Family Foundation, which grants funding to help art organizations show local artists' work; and fund-raising for New Mexico State University Center for the Arts.

MICHAEL HURD

Major Contributor to the Arts ♦ San Patricio

Recognized for: His delicately rendered New Mexico landscape paintings; sustaining and sharing the rich tradition of four generations of the Wyeth-Hurd family; and his efforts to save *The Future Belongs to Those Who Prepare for It*, a 64,000-pound plaster mural by his father, Peter Hurd, from demolition and relocate it from Houston to the Artesia Public Library.

NEW MEXICO MAGAZINE

Major Contributor to the Arts ♦ Santa Fe

Recognized for: Building the local economy by enticing visitors to enjoy New Mexico's artistic and cultural attractions for the past ninety-three years.



The **Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts** were established in 1974 to acknowledge the vital role of creative people in our culture. Recipients have included Georgia O'Keeffe, Robert Redford, George R. R. Martin, and Maria Martinez. The 2016 nominations were accepted by arts groups and interested New Mexicans and reviewed by a seven-member selection committee that is a division of the New Mexico Arts Commission.

An opening exhibition and reception for the 2016 Governor's Awards for Excellence in the Arts will be held Friday, September 23, from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. in the Governor's Gallery, on the fourth floor of Santa Fe's New Mexico State Capitol. The awards ceremonies will be held at 5:15 p.m., Friday, September 23, in the St. Francis Auditorium of the New Mexico Museum of Art. The events are free, and the public is invited to attend.

Bradley's style is often compared to folk art, an observation some might find diminishing, but one he appreciates instead. "I love folk art," he said. "Good folk art has a special honesty and magical charm, a certain *je ne sais quoi*."

Bradley's inspirations don't stop there. *To Sleep, Perchance to Dream*, which depicts a Native man snoozing while a mountain lion peers over him, and the trappings of modern life—the highway, a hotel, a pawn shop—lurk in the background, is clearly influenced by Rousseau's *Sleeping Gypsy*. Often, dreamy images from Magritte paintings such as *Man in Bowler Hat* or *The Pilgrim* seem to have drifted into Bradley's consciousness and onto his canvases.

"I guess I turned it into my thing to reinterpret famous works from Western art and in doing so create a cross-cultural narrative that involves humor and more grave sociopolitical references," Bradley said.

Certainly, Bradley's paintings capture both the bitter and the sweet, something that seems to reflect his own experience of nearly thirty years in the Native art world.

"I think my first Indian Market was in 1978 or '79, while I was a student at IAIA," he related. "Since I was a new artist with no clout, they stuck me in a crowded booth with two other artists with no clout, on the corner by First National Bank. The great Fritz Scholder stopped by the booth and bought a small painting from me! I was thrilled."

A year or two later, Bradley won a fellowship from Santa Fe Indian Market's organizers, the Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA), and got his own booth—right next to Santa Clara painter Helen Hardin. He was on the ascent, but with the honey, came the sting. As America's largest Native American art show grew and gained renown worldwide, it also attracted something no one had foreseen: frauds.

"Such a big, glitzy event with tons of easy money and little or no scrutiny naturally attracted con artists," Bradley explained, referring to non-Native people posing as indigenous artists.

As a result, Bradley helped found the Native American Artists Association, which demanded more verification of Indian credentials and tribal affiliations at Santa Fe Indian

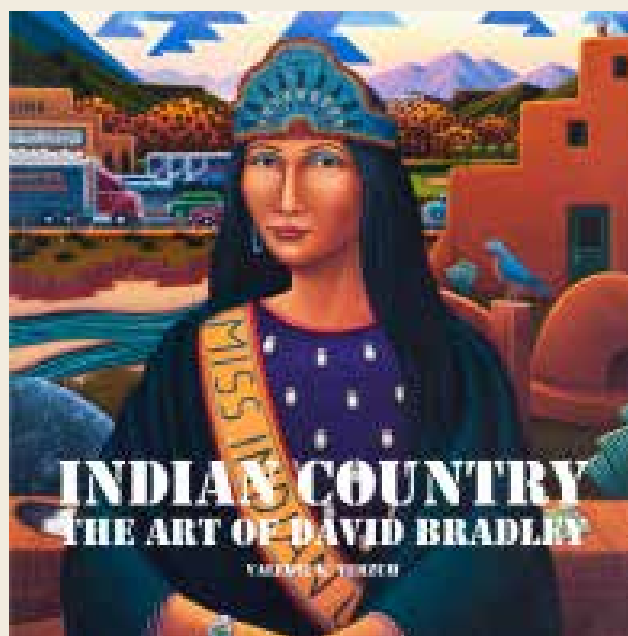
Market and in Santa Fe's art galleries. Eventually, their efforts culminated in the federal Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990, a truth-in-advertising law making it illegal to falsely suggest an item is Indian produced, an Indian product, or the product of a particular US Indian tribe. Today, violators can be fined up to \$1 million.

"It turned out to be a long and vicious battle which dragged on for years," Bradley said, noting that speaking out on the issue to art aficionados, journalists, and powerful art dealers didn't win him many popularity contests. Still, he's proud that he and other Native artists fought the good fight.

"As Indian people, we have had everything taken from us for 500 years, and now that our very identity had become a marketable commodity, we weren't going to stand by and watch that get stolen, too," he declared. "I have the satisfaction of knowing we made a difference and helped the Indian community rid themselves of many pseudo-Indian profiteers. The scam still continues on a smaller scale, but at least we tried our best. The story of this widespread crime against Indians and we grassroots Indian artists rising up in a struggle that took us to the very halls of Congress is a unique event in American history. We are proud to have fought the battle and won."

When considering his artistic legacy, Bradley expressed the same beauty and truth we have come to expect from his paintings. "This disease leads to total paralysis and death, but in some ways I am lucky," he said. "I have had time to prepare for all of this, and I have gone through many changes. I have always spent much of my career caring for my special-needs son, and now this new challenge has our family closer than ever. As the saying goes, we take it one day at a time. Like most artists, I hope that my work is still recognized as significant a century or two from now. Besides that, I hope that I have been a good father, husband, and friend to my family and friends." ■

Freelance writer Tricia Ware is the manager of the Santa Fe Gallery Association and the sole proprietor of Lucidity Editing, which specializes in the development of nonfiction book manuscripts.



Opposite: Bradley at Blue Rain Gallery. Photograph by Minesh Bacrania.

Above: Bradley at work in his studio on *Land O' Lakes*, *Land O' Bucks*, *Land O' Fakes*. This piece is currently on view in the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture's *Culture Power* exhibition. Courtesy of the artist.

Bottom: MIAC curator Valerie Verzuh wrote this 2015 book, with a foreword from Suzan Shown Harjo. Read more about it at mnmpr.org.