

Ryan Burr's mural in the cafeteria at Fort Berthold Community College.



NEW TOWN AREA ARTISTS SHARE CULTURE THROUGH

Creativity

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The Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara nations have long been the inspiration of great artists. George Catlin and Karl Bodmer are just two of many world-renowned artists who have captured the culture and beauty of North Dakota and its Native American tribes through their work.

The native culture that inspired artists like Catlin and Bodmer in the 1800s continues today in many forms in New Town. Local artists and members of the Three Affiliated Tribes perform, paint and share their culture, heritage, and creativity throughout North Dakota and the world.

THREE AFFILIATED TRIBES MUSEUM

Many of the famed artists who have captured this culture have their work displayed at the Three Affiliated Tribes Museum in New Town. The 40-year-old museum features cultural artifacts from the tribes, prints of Catlin's and Bodmer's works and original prints from local artists and members of the tribe.

Museum Administrator Marilyn Hudson says it showcases many pieces that reflect both art and lifestyle. "Art in the utilitarian sense has always been valued by our people," she says. "Practical things were decorated – including hides for teepees, pottery bowls and clothing. Art was not done for art's sake. It was done to decorate useful things."

The Lewis and Clark National Signature Event, sponsored by the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara nations is August 17

through 20 at the Four Bears Peninsula, just west of New Town. During the event, the Three Affiliated Tribes Museum will celebrate the artwork of tribal members, and will also feature a traveling exhibit with artwork reflective of Lewis and Clark and their journey.

LITTLE SHELL POWWOW

The Little Shell Powwow, New Town's biggest yearly celebration, is held for four days during the second weekend in August and draws traditional Native American dancers from across the country. Jerome Dancing Bull, a member of the Antelope Society, which sponsors the Little Shell Powwow, says the dancing celebration this year is on pace to be the largest one yet. "Little Shell is August 10 to 13, the weekend before the Lewis and Clark Signature Event powwow, so dancers from around the country are coming to New Town for two weeks to take in both celebrations," says Dancing Bull. "We think of the Little Shell Powwow as a kick-off for the Signature Event."

The powwow has been held outside New Town at the Shell Arbor since the town was formed after Garrison Dam was built in 1953. "The powwow is a celebration of our tribe's traditions and culture," says Dancing Bull. A long-time tradition in New Town, the celebration has now gained a national reputation and is one of the largest powwows in the tri-state area. This year the Little Shell Powwow is awarding five places to traditional Native American dance competitors, with the first-place winner taking \$1,200 in prize money.



INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS SHARE CULTURE

From quilting and painting, to dancing and music, many Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara, and present and former residents of New Town are sharing their culture through art.

Star quilts have long been a symbol of the Native American culture and heritage. Avid quilter, **Mildred Jordt** says of the design, “The star in quilts represents the morning star, or new beginnings; the start of a new day.”



Mildred Jordt holds a quilt she made to commemorate the old Elbowoods School.

Jordt has strong ties to New Town and uses quilting to celebrate the culture and heritage of her tribe. She celebrates her Native heritage by giving away all of her star quilts to friends, family, and tribal members.

Her most famous project is the Sakakawea quilt, now on display at

the Three Affiliated Tribes Museum in New Town. The quilt features a portrait of Sakakawea, patterned after the statue on the North Dakota Capitol grounds. “I wanted to make this quilt to commemorate the bicentennial of Sakakawea’s return to the Mandan people,” says Jordt. This quilt has an extra special meaning for her, however, because her grandmother, Hannah Fox, posed as Sakakawea for the sculpture.



Ryan Burr had never considered himself a mural artist. During his first 15 years as an artist, the largest painting he had done was a three-by-four-foot canvas. But, that changed in 2003 when he was asked by the tribal chairman to paint a mural in the new tribal office. Nine days later, an entire wall in the chairman’s office was painted with the tribal logo. The chairman was so impressed he asked Burr to paint a mural of the tribal tourism logo on the opposite wall.

Three years later, Burr has painted a 360-degree mural at 4 Bears Casino and two murals at the Fort Berthold Community College. “All of my murals deal with the proud history of the Three Affiliated Tribes,” says Burr. “I am Mandan and Hidatsa from Mandaree, so it’s been an honor to contribute to the preservation of our culture.”

In addition to murals, Burr does pen and ink drawing, acrylic painting, and northern traditional dancing. “Native art is an integral part of our past and future. We used art in our everyday life and it was part of the spiritual realm that connected us to nature and animals,” says Burr. “Being sur-

rounded by it my whole life, I never thought it would take me in so many directions.”

Burr has art displayed in galleries across the United States and in Europe, and is in Germany until December promoting and performing powwows and traditional northern dance.

Fellow painter **Dennis Fox, Jr.**, also works to preserve the culture of his ancestors. After

study and research, Fox’s painting style and techniques now emulate that of his descendants so he can best preserve their culture. “Today’s Native American artists have the responsibility to make sure their culture continues for their children,” says Fox.



“She Returned to Heal the Earth,” painting by Dennis Fox.

Fox studied fine arts and anthropology at the University of Maryland in College Park and worked for the Smithsonian Institution’s Folklife Program before returning to New Town to continue his art work. His work, found in museums, galleries, and private collections across the county, ranges from traditional Native American styles to avant-garde abstract. He says he strives for a contemporary style, but seeks to reflect the ancient traditions of his ancestors. “When I create a work of art that is directly related to the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes, I listen to stories from tribal elders and study styles and techniques,” says Fox. “It’s very important that I’m accurate.”

Fox’s most recent work, a recreation of buffalo hide paintings given to Thomas Jefferson by Lewis and Clark, is displayed at the Indian Hall at Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia. Fox recreated a buffalo robe painted by a Mandan man and an Indian map of the Missouri River painted on buffalo hide.

Dozens of other artists share the culture of the Three Affiliated Tribes and New Town through their work. Among them, Grammy nominee and internationally renowned flute player and storyteller **Keith Bear** proudly shares the stories of the Northern Plains Indians with the world. Nationally recognized Sakakawea impersonator **Amy Mossett** tells the story of her people and their culture across the county.

The proud and rich culture of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara will continue to be celebrated, as today’s artists share their ancestor’s story through their creations.

Many projects and performances at the National Signature Event and at the Three Affiliated Tribes Museum are supported by Lewis and Clark grant funding through the North Dakota Council on the Arts. For more information about the North Dakota Council on the Arts and its programs that support communities across the state, call 701-328-7590, or visit its website at www.discovernd.com/arts.