



Fabric being woven on one of Joanne Hall's larger looms.



JOANNE HALL, WEAVING



TIM RYAN, NATIVE LIFEWAYS & TOOLS



HENRY REAL BIRD, COWBOY POETRY



JEFFREY FUNK, BLACKSMITHING

“MCAM shines a light on Montanans who are among the best in the world in their art form and who are a vital part of Montana’s heritage and cultural landscape.”

—Montana Arts Council Folklorist
Taylor Burby

The Montana Circle of American Masters (MCAM) recognizes Montana folk and traditional artists for artistic excellence in their work, along with their role in preserving and passing on their knowledge. This year, the Montana Arts Council welcomed four new additions to the Circle: blacksmith Jeffrey Funk, weaver Joanne Hall, cowboy poet Henry Real Bird, and

native lifeways and tools instructor Tim Ryan. Funk, Hall, Real Bird and Ryan join 52 previous honorees in an illustrious group that represents some of the most skilled and respected tradition bearers in Montana.

The folk and traditional arts are rooted in a community (ethnic, geographic, linguistic, religious, occupational) or family. They reflect the aesthetics and values of the community in which they arise and are often symbols of a group’s identity. The skills of producing the artwork are often taught person-to-person, and a practitioner’s craft exists as part of a lineage and tradition which extends well beyond their own career. As such, MCAM honorees are expected to not only display artistic mastery but also show a commitment to passing on their knowledge. Join us in welcoming Jeffrey Funk, Joanne Hall, Henry Real Bird, and Tim Ryan to the Montana Circle of American Masters.

Let’s meet
the inductees!

TRADITIONAL ARTS RENEWED



Photos courtesy of Taylor Burby.

Montana Arts Council Welcomes New Inductees into the Montana Circle of American Masters

By Taylor Burby

JEFFREY FUNK, BLACKSMITHING

Jeffrey Funk has played an instrumental role in the blacksmithing revival in the United States, helping to sustain and evolve a craft that had nearly vanished by the mid-20th century. Historically, iron technology was the domain of blacksmiths, who made essential repairs and steel tools for woodworking, among other tasks, but industrialization rendered the village blacksmith obsolete by the mid-20th century. Interested in blacksmithing as it aligned with the back-to-the-land movement, Jeffrey attended a workshop in 1984, at a time when the craft of blacksmithing was on life support.

Afterwards, Jeffrey began carrying the torch. His generation of blacksmiths eventually grew into the thousands practicing today. Jeffrey's 50 years of work is both the catalyst and product of this revival and era of rediscovering tradition.

According to long-time friend and nominator Dave Hadden, "It is not easy to exaggerate Jeffrey's mastery of his craft." From scythes to railings and sculpture, the broad spectrum of Jeffrey's work fall into three veins: practical necessity, architecture, and public sculpture. Creations of practical necessity include his crafting of—and reinterpreting in both function and form—traditional tools, such as the hammers, tongs, and anvils he uses in his own smithing and in teaching courses at his nonprofit, the New Agrarian School. His architectural work includes gates, fire screens and hardware, and door hinges of materials such as stainless steel, wrought iron, and bronze. In his public sculpture work, Jeffrey creates commissioned pieces for individuals, institutions, and cities, such as the Aeolian harp, a name given to a diverse group of musical instruments—originating with the ancient Greeks—that produce sound as the wind blows through their strings. Regardless of category, Jeffrey's work emphasizes technical and aesthetic integrity.

For Jeffrey, producing these works is an iconic act; to create a tool is to craft a piece of art woven into the fabric of society. Through the process of smithing, a blacksmith engages with the physical environment in a deeply meaningful way—a creation that integrates spirit, mind, hand, surroundings, and utility. This work is both an act of joy and necessity, resulting in functional art that, in line with the aforementioned categories, encourages self-reliance in the most positive sense, such as the scythe he forged and uses to cut grain; hardware that enhances the function of homes, like structural hardware for trusses; and conversation pieces that serve as gathering points for communities across the country where his commissioned works are displayed.

Blacksmith Glenn Gilmore, a long-time friend and fellow MCAM recipient, notes, "One of Jeffrey's strong personal characteristics is the willingness to share his knowledge." In addition to teaching at Penland eight times since his first invitation in 1990, Jeffrey has taught blacksmithing at several other schools before opening his own eight years ago. These include the Peters Valley School of Craft and the New England School of Metalwork, where his experiences ultimately inspired him to establish The New Agrarian School—his most significant endeavor and the only school of its kind in the West. Through studio assistantships, weekend classes, flexible residencies, and one- to three-

week intensive workshops—such as Blacksmith’s Tools and Carpenter’s Tools—Jeffrey and guest instructors offer an advanced curriculum that, while rooted in history and tradition, embraces a forward-thinking approach to the craft. Reflecting on Jeffrey’s teaching, Dave stated, “Jeffrey teaches across the depth and breadth of his art. As a teacher, he regards his students with seriousness and affection; he’s an incredible teacher.”

Despite flying under the radar, Jeffrey has been recognized in publications featuring American craft and trade—including those local—such as Mountain Outlaw, the Daily Inter Lake, and the Great Falls Tribune, and notably, Bryce Andrew’s Holding Fire: A Reckoning with the American West. Further, in 2023 the popular television program, Forged in Fire, filmed an episode at the Agrarian School as part of their “on the road” series visiting several schools across the nation. Another unusual milestone was the invitation he received to represent the U.S. as one of six to eight smiths from around the world working to create and erect a memorial for WWII veterans in Ypres, Belgium.

JOANNE HALL, WEAVING

Weaver Joanne Hall is Swedish-American. Three of her grandparents came from Sweden, and she grew up within a Minnesotan Swedish community. Raised in that environment, she was surrounded by a rich tapestry of tradition, including Swedish

immigrant weaving. Eventually, she would also take inspiration from the weaving heritage in Sweden; as an adult, Joanne began traveling to the country to learn more about her cultural heritage, especially weaving traditions. While there, Joanne spent time with her cousins, learning about their weaving experiences, in addition to visiting and weaving alongside other weavers in central and southern Sweden. Further, she built relationships with the editors of VÄV, the only textile magazine in Scandinavia, and owners of major Swedish yarn manufacturers. Regarding forms of textual and visual resources, Joanne also referenced Swedish books, magazines, weaving exhibits, weaving conferences, and exhibits at Swedish museums.

In her vast repertoire, she has woven images of the people, landscape, animals, and the world around her. This includes tapestries inspired by Swedish techniques, including traditional weaves she describes as enriching to the homes and lives of those in the community. Some examples of Swedish weaves that she has continued to weave are called the Swedish Art Weaves, which derive from Skåna, a province in southern Sweden. These techniques are decorative weaves which originally made colorful coverlets, cushions, table runners, and wall decorations for special occasions. She has also woven Swedish weaving techniques for coverlets, pillows, and wall art from other parts of Sweden.

In addition to her personal studies and projects, Joanne has dedicated her life to passing on what she has learned—including those above listed techniques, to the broader weaving community. Joanne first began instructing after receiving her master’s degree in textile design from the University of Minnesota, when she relocated and taught weaving at the University of Montana in Missoula in 1971. After leaving the university, even while weaving tapestries full-time, Joanne taught workshops every year in various locations around the US and Canada. Today, however, Joanne is no longer weaving personal projects; 20 years ago, she retired and since has concentrated solely on teaching and inspiring her students through private lessons and workshops. To do so, she has acquired Swedish weaving equipment and yarns and generously shared them with students.

Unlike the Minnesotan Swedish-American community that raised her, Swedish-Americans in Montana are spread out. Joanne makes a conscious effort to connect with them, sharing resources and helping maintain a weaving community in the state. According to fellow Helena Spinners’ and Weavers’ Guild members, Annette Cade and Allison Grover, by embracing her parents’ Swedish heritage, Joanne has “amplified it to thousands of people in Montana, across North America, and around the world. She has literally touched the lives of thousands of students and wannabe weavers.”



Photos courtesy of Eric Heidle.

Beyond teaching, Joanne's accomplishments include awards and commissioned pieces, the latter which are featured in spaces across the US, from galleries to hospitals. In 1990, she was invited to weave a series of six tapestries for Montana Fish Wildlife and Park's Percent for the Arts initiative.

In 1995, Joanne wove her largest tapestry for a hospital in Dallas; titled "Texas Wildflowers," it is 20 feet tall and over 8 feet wide. Similarly, she wove another 16-foot-wide tapestry for a cancer treatment center. For these large tapestries, using traditional tapestry techniques would require years to complete them, so she innovated; instead of traditional techniques, she leaned into her knowledge of Swedish techniques developed during the arts and crafts movement from over 100 years ago. Further, as an honor for her 50 years of teaching, she received the Montana Living Treasures award in 1996, primarily for her contributions to Montana weaving organizations and the many weaving workshops. Finally, in 2003, she was invited to exhibit her tapestries at the Montana Governor's mansion.

HENRY REAL BIRD, COWBOY POETRY

Henry Real Bird's work is a communicative art; it is poetry that blends his Native heritage with the identity of an "assimilated Indian." Via his work, he brings ancient wisdom to life, transforming it into poetry, essays, plays, and performances. His writing offers an Apsáalooke perspective on the Western North American cattle culture, weaving his thoughts into soundscapes that create emotionally evocative imagery. Henry sees poetry as true freedom—a way to explore the deeper meanings of life.

Henry was raised on the Crow Reservation ranch lands by his grandparents, who taught him Crow, his first and primary language. This deeply influences his poetry, as his poems begin in Crow in his mind before being translated into English. This

process gives his work a unique rhythm and depth, reflecting the dual experience of living as both a Native person and a cowboy. Through this lens, his poetry offers insight into a life of navigating both Western culture and the traditions and mysticism that anchor him in his Crow identity and perspective. The Native perspective in his poetry is deeply rooted in the past, in the traditions of his Crow ancestors, where thoughts were once expressed through cave drawings depicting events like buffalo jumps.

Moreover, his poetry reflects the rich history of cowboy poetry brought to the region by Irish and Hungarian cowboys who traveled up the trail through Dodge City and the trailhead of Miles City. These cowboys brought folk songs that explored the experiences and etiquette of cowboy life—stories that cowboy poets continue to retell. Henry adds a new dimension to this tradition by offering the perspective of a Native cowboy, blending classic cowboy songs with the wisdom of his heritage. As Brad McMullen, Nevada's State Folklorist and former National Cowboy Poetry Gathering Manager, states, "While some may deride cowboy poetry as doggerel, Henry's work and style of recitation are a wonderful example of the best cowboy poetry offers as a tradition. His poetry and his delivery are a masterclass in the art form, and he deeply understands his heritage, weaving it in masterfully for the audience."

Henry has been deeply involved in the education and cultural preservation of Crow tradition throughout his career. He served as Curriculum Coordinator for Project Head Start, Language Arts Supervisor at St. Xavier Indian Mission, and Summer Program Planner for 4-H and Youth Programs on the

Crow Reservation. His leadership extended to his role as president of Little Big Horn College and as a member of the Montana Advisory Committee on Children and Youth, as well as the Crow Central Education Commission. Real Bird also co-developed The Indian Reading Series, a language development program used on twelve Native American reservations in the Northwest. Passionate about keeping the Crow language alive, he writes in both Crow and English. Finally, in the summer of 2010, a year after being appointed the third poet laureate of Montana by Governor Brian Schweitzer, Henry embarked on a 415-mile journey by horseback, during which he distributed books of poetry to communities along his path, aiming to bring literature to rural areas.

Henry is not short on accomplishments. In addition to his history as poet laureate, he has authored six anthologies, four collections of poetry, and twelve children's books, which he illustrated. He is also an active and decades-long participant in the Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada, where he recites his work annually. Further, his poetry earned him the prestigious Western Heritage Award from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and has been documented by the Library of Congress, featured by entities such as Yellowstone Public Radio, Humanities Montana, and the Western Folklife Center. In 2012, Henry was named Cowboy Poet of the Year at the 16th annual Academy of Western Artists Will Roger Awards. In 2020, Henry's poem "Thought" was documented and archived by the Library of Congress in their "Living Nations, Living Words" collection.

Photos courtesy of Jessica Lifland.





Photos courtesy of Tim Ryan.

TIM RYAN, NATIVE LIFEWAYS AND TOOLS

As an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, Tim Ryan’s work embodies the material culture and traditional, place-based ecological knowledge preserved by his ancestors for thousands of years. His research on Salish seasonal rounds, lifeways, and economy has driven him to revive, use, and promote the traditional tools and material goods of his ancestors, leading him to become an instructor of traditional skills.

These tools include grinding stones, stone hammers and axes, bison bladder canteens, beaded materials, digging sticks and stick games, fishing tools, parfleche and rawhide works, bows and arrows, and bark baskets and containers. Each tool Tim creates represents those his people used as they thrived on the land through their seasonal rounds. For example, digging sticks were passed down by women who used them to harvest bitterroot growing near camps. Bitterroot was a vital food source, especially when hunting parties returned empty-handed. The digging stick, akin to a Native crowbar, was designed with precision: the ground served as the fulcrum, the shaft as leverage, and the person applied force. The intentional curve of the stick acted as a lever, much like a foot in terms of physics, and it was sized to each individual to prevent strain on the user’s back. While this is just one of countless examples, by understanding both the historical significance and the

science behind such material culture and Indigenous technologies, those who view and use Tim’s work quickly understand that Native practices, developed over millennia, were far from primitive, remain applicable to everyday life, and represent his people’s deep connection to and knowledge of the land.

Tim has shared this knowledge through various means, including demonstrations, hands-on traditional skill teachings, and contributions to publications. His work has also been featured in interpretive centers and museums, as well as through collaborations with federal and state agencies, civic organizations, schools via OPI’s Indian Education for All, summer youth camps, and in his role at Salish Kootenai College. He has work institutions such as school districts, Tribal Social Services, Butte Public Archives, Circle of Trust Suicide Prevention, Glacier National Park, the Montana State Office of Tourism, and Salish Kootenai College. Additionally, Tim has contributed material culture items to entities like Kootenai National Forest, Montana Historical Society, and the National Bison Range. Through camps and courses, such as the five-day “Salish Pend d’Orielle Culture Camp” and “Bridging the Divide Culture Camp,” Tim teaches students about traditional ecological knowledge, cultural practices, history, and tool use.

In his current role as Department Head for Culture and Language in the Native American Studies Division, Tim facilitates experiential learning in Native American culture by incorporating STEM, Indigenous sciences, ethnobotany, natural history, and traditional lifeways—all of which are

integrated with the seasonal rounds of the Salish and Pend d’Oreille Tribes of Montana. When teaching his courses, he aligns the curriculum with these seasonal cycles. Regarding his teaching, Salish Kootenai College’s Vice President of Academic Affairs, Michael Munson, Ed.D., notes that Tim’s “apprentices lovingly refer to him as their ilimixwum (chief/leader).”

Additionally, Tim serves as Project Supervisor for the summer youth program, Mission Mountain Youth Crew, where he teaches students from the Flathead Reservation forest restoration techniques using traditional methods and hand tools. His work provides career-track exposure in the natural resource fields, ensuring that the Native perspective influences these industries for generations to come. At the Butte High School History Club, he led activities such as bison butchering with traditional stone tools, stone tool making, hide processing, and willow fish trap construction. Finally, in his role with Ancestral Skills & Technologies Northwest, Tim consults on and provides educational outreach regarding the crafting of traditional material culture of Northwest tribes.

Tim has dedicated his life to preserving and sharing traditional knowledge, documenting it through countless publications and videos. Through his teaching of tool craftsmanship and use, he ensures that future generations remain connected to their cultural heritage. Michael further recognizes these efforts, stating, “The perpetuation of our cultural arts and ways of being isn’t just a job for Tim—it is a way of life!”



MONTANA CIRCLE OF **AMERICAN MASTERS** 2024

The Montana Circle of American Masters (MCAM) recognizes Montana folk and traditional artists for artistic excellence in their work, along with their role in preserving and passing on their knowledge.

By Taylor Burby

This year, the Montana Arts Council welcomed three new additions to the Circle:

Dakota bead artist and star quilter **Ramey Growing Thunder** of the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation; boot maker **Mike Ryan** of Helena, and Crow bead artist and fashion designer **Olivia “Rose” Williamson** of the

Crow Reservation. Growing Thunder, Ryan, and Williamson join 49 previous honorees in an illustrious group that represents some of the most skilled and respected tradition bearers in Montana. MCAM shines a light on Montanans who are among the best in the world in their artform and who are a vital part of Montana’s heritage and cultural landscape.

The folk and traditional arts are rooted in a community (ethnic, geographic, linguistic, religious, occupational) or family. They reflect the aesthetics and values of the community in which they arise and are often symbols of

a group’s identity. The skills of producing the artwork are often taught person-to-person, and a practitioner’s craft exists as part of a lineage and tradition which extends well beyond their own career. As such, MCAM honorees are expected to not only display artistic mastery but also show a commitment to passing on their knowledge.

Join us in welcoming Ramey Growing Thunder, Mike Ryan, and Olivia “Rose” Williamson to the Montana Circle of American Masters.



Ramey Growing Thunder, Ph.D

Ramey Growing Thunder, is an award-winning traditional Dakota and Diné bead artist and star quilter, as well as an educator and Director of the Language & Culture Department for Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes. Through her mastery of traditional beadwork and quilt making, coupled with her role in educating individuals at local, state, and national levels, Ramey has dedicated her life to safeguarding her culture. Through her artistry, she aims to honor the legacy and teachings of her ancestors and ensure that their traditions thrive for generations to come.

In 1982, as a young girl, Ramey sat beside her mother as she crafted beaded belt buckles, pouches, and moccasins to support their family's income, absorbing the intricate process. With her mother's guidance, she began her own journey into beadwork, starting with friendship bracelets for her brothers. As she grew, so did her skills, from assisting her mother with royalty crowns and moccasins to adorning friends with beaded hair barrettes during her high school years. In 2000, while attending college in Poplar, MT, Ramey enrolled in a star quilt making class, discovering her natural talent for quilt-making, which evolved from baby quilts to intricate king-size creations. Marrying in 2003, Ramey has also collaborated with her husband and renowned ledger artist, Darryl Growing Thunder, combining her beadwork expertise with his artistic background to create larger-scale projects, including fully beaded cradleboards and competition bags. Together, they honed their entrepreneurial skills, marking a fruitful 21-year journey of artistic collaboration and personal growth.

While her expansive repertoire includes cradleboards, bags, moccasins, beaded jewelry, and ribbon skirts, Ramey's niche in the art world is her beaded late 1800s antique doctor bags. When beading, she replaces the bag's leather with brain-tanned hides from deer, elk, or moose, while utilizing the original hardware. When selecting her beads, Ramey occasionally travels out of state just to locate antique beads and supplies. Her craft pays homage to a historical cultural artistic statement whereby Dakota women adorned doctor bags with beads as a sign of gratitude for Western medicine doctors who helped their community.

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Ramey Growing
Thunder
2024

Making the doctor bags not only allows her to keep a tradition practiced by few alive but also honors her efforts to become a doctor herself; on May 13, 2023, Ramey achieved her Ph.D. in interdisciplinary studies with an emphasis on cultural and linguistic anthropology, Native American studies, and educational leadership.

Throughout her career, Ramey has garnered numerous accolades. From winning her first Southwestern Association for Indian Arts award in 2003 for her cradle board to securing first-place honors in the beadwork division in 2022 and 2023 at the Heard Art Show in Phoenix, AZ, her journey has been marked by a string of successes. Notable achievements include winning Best of Show at the Fort Peck Community College art show in 2005 and earning top honors in beadwork competitions such as the Northern Plains Indian Art Market and the Heard Art Show. Ramey's consistent recognition underscores her mastery of beadwork techniques, such as the Sioux two-lane stitch, and her ability to create intricately crafted pieces that captivate audiences and judges alike.

Ramey, drawing on the inspiration from the leadership and discipline instilled by her late father, embodies his enduring motto, "aim higher." Infused with this guiding ethos, she channels her efforts towards uplifting her community, leveraging her expertise and resources to empower others to enhance their incomes and bolster the local economy. Following her father's passing in 2022, Ramey took on the role of teaching her mother the art of crafting star quilts. Equipped with these newfound skills, her mother was able to supplement her income in the wake of her husband's passing. Furthermore, Ramey has taught her three sons, one of whom now supplies the community with star quilts for cultural events such as birthdays, funerals, and star quilt ceremonies. Beyond her immediate family, Ramey extends her reach by offering cultural arts classes to K-12 and GED students, teachers, and college students across several towns, including Fort Kipp, Brockton, Poplar, Wolf Point, Frontier, Oswego, and Frazer. These educational initiatives encompass a variety of traditional crafts, including moccasin making, beaded jewelry making, and ribbon skirt making, and have helped students to support their families and preserve their cultural traditions for future generations. For these efforts, Ramey received the Montana Ambassador Educator of the Year award in 2023.

Mike Ryan

Over the course of his 45-year career in crafting Western and working boots and shoes, Mike Ryan has meticulously crafted over 5,000 pairs of custom boots for clients spanning from Montana to the broader Western region. With an unwavering dedication to preserving the heritage and enduring legacy of Western leatherwork, Mike has painstakingly crafted each pair, ensuring that his craftsmanship embodies the essence of tradition, durability, and timeless style.

In Montana’s vast and rugged landscape, Western boots have long served as essential attire within the ranching, rodeo, and outdoor work culture, symbolizing both practical necessity and iconic Western heritage, with roots dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. The demand for quality work footwear, essential for ranching, logging, mining, and other outdoor occupations, has endured and is closely entwined with the development of civic and cultural communities. Mike’s work not only meets this demand but embodies a connection to Montana’s cultural heritage and values, and it reflects the enduring tradition of boot making, which has remained essentially unchanged for over 160 years.

Growing up outside Brusett, Montana, Mike developed an interest in boot and shoemaking, inspired by a local shoe repair shop in Jordan that served area ranching communities. After his service in the Navy, Mike returned to Montana and gained foundational skills at Al’s Bootery in Billings before delving into custom boot making under the guidance of Mike Ives. Working at Boyce Tack & Western store for six years further honed his expertise before he eventually opened his own shop in Helena in 1986. Here, he not only provided shoe repair services but also built a loyal following for his custom boots. Many of these clients have become repeat customers, a testament to the quality and style of his work. Over the years, Mike has continued to refine his craft through collaborations with other boot and saddle makers. He has even traveled out of state to learn custom shoe making, ensuring he could cater to a diverse clientele in his community.

Mike’s boots stand as a testament to the rich tradition of Western leatherwork, offering a diverse range of styles from functional work boots to intricately designed rodeo and dress boots, each crafted

MONTANA CIRCLE OF AMERICAN MASTERS

Mike Ryan
2024

with precision and passion. According to Mike Korn, friend and client of four decades, “Each of Mike’s boots are hand-made, literally constructed from the ground up, from measuring a customers’ feet, crafting a personal last (the form on which the boot is built), cutting and sewing the various elements together made from a wide variety of leathers from bull hide to exotics, along with adding any kind of decorative stitching that a customer may desire.” As stated by Korn, these customers ranger from working cowboys and foresters, to gentlemen ranchers, and all those “who ride the concrete canyons of towns and urban areas.”

Today, Mike serves as a tradition bearer, an inspiration for the next generation of boot makers, and the owner of a cultural institution, Ryan’s Boot & Shoe Repair. Korn refers to Mike’s shop as a “cultural experience,” a space where members of the Western community congregate around Mike’s work bench, sharing coffee and current events between customers. Korn describes this space as “a maze of stitching equipment, sewing machines and tools, each dedicated to particular purpose and process.” It is within this maze, and around this boot-piled work bench, that Mike has imparted traditional handcrafting techniques and methods to employee over the years, including his daughter, with some of his protégées venturing out to start businesses of their own.

Through his participation in cultural events and collaborations, Mike’s impact also extends beyond his shop. During the mid-1980s, he began collaborating with the staff of the Montana Folklife Project, which resulted in interviews and photographs of his work being included in their collection, available to the public through the Montana Historical Society’s archives. Additionally, Mike has participated in the Montana Folk Festival as a folk arts demonstrator, sharing not only his own story but also the rich heritage of Montana with thousands of festival-goers. Mike’s story has been featured in numerous articles in Montana newspapers and magazines, including *Rural Montana* (the Montana Electric Cooperative Magazine), the *Helena Independent Record*, and the *Butte Standard*, sharing his work with the public.





Olivia “Rose” Williamson

Raised within the rich cultural tapestry of the Crow Indian Reservation in southeast Montana, Olivia “Rose” Williamson is not only a talented bead artist and fashion designer but a proud ambassador of her heritage. With a deep reverence for the traditions passed down by her ancestors, Rose carries the flame of her culture into the future, ensuring its continued vibrancy through exquisite beadwork and clothing designs that bridge tradition and modernity. According to Rose, her art is “made for the hundreds of future Crow kids yet to be born.”

As the owner and operator of Lady Pompadour Beadwork and Design, Rose has garnered widespread recognition within the Apsáalooke community and across the Northern Plains. Renowned for her unparalleled expertise in traditional beadwork, Rose is affectionately referred to by friend Carrie Moran McCleary as a “certified bead florist,” further stating that Rose’s old-school Apsáalooke florals stand out as unmatched in their community. Rose’s mastery extends beyond these florals to encompass a diverse range of traditional and modern Apsáalooke clothing, intricate horse gear, moccasins, fully beaded outfits, and powwow attire, a testament to her years as a powwow dancer. Each piece she creates pays homage to the enduring traditions that have shaped her community’s way of life and reflects her decades of beading and sewing. Furthermore, they embody the techniques she has mastered since learning to bead and sew from her mother at the age of seven, as well as the knowledge she gained from numerous mentors in the years that followed.

Throughout her career, Rose has achieved numerous notable milestones and accolades. In 2005, her talent was honored with the prestigious “Best in Show” award for a beaded Crow-style cradleboard at the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. In 2021, Rose was recognized when she received first place for her contemporary work at the Native Days Art Show in Crow Agency. Rose’s artistic prowess has continued to earn her acceptance into esteemed events such as the Native Peoples Market in Rapid City, South Dakota, and the renowned Heard Indian Art Market in both 2022 and 2023, further establishing her as a prominent figure within her community.

Rose’s work has graced both runways and cultural centers alike.

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MASTERS**
Olivia “Rose”
Williamson
2024

Her jewelry has adorned the showcases of esteemed Crow fashion designers, including Designs by Della and Plains Soul models. On the runway, Rose’s original designs have captivated audiences at events such as the Montana Folk Festival’s First Peoples’ Fashion Show and the Uplifting Artists Fashion Show and Art Gala at the Seattle Art Museum. Through these platforms, she has not only showcased her talent but also shared the rich heritage of Crow culture with a wider audience. Additionally, the Western Heritage Center of Billings has recognized Rose’s artistic prowess by featuring her crafted Apsáalooke-designed, acrylic-painted rawhide necklace and earring set, further solidifying her status as a respected artist and cultural ambassador.

Rose also donates and uses her work to raise awareness on critical issues faced by the Native community. The Billings Urban Indian Health and Wellness Center commissioned Rose to complete a beaded wall hanging, which was used as a billboard and handbill across the state of Montana. This piece featured an image that would encourage community members to screen for colorectal cancer—an image of an Apsáalooke family in front of the Apsáalooke mountains, featuring the sky, trees, and grasslands. Further, Rose is a strong advocate for Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP). She has participated in art shows, walks, and other activities that raise awareness of MMIP, such as her textile, acrylic, and mixed-media submissions to the Emerson Center for the Arts and Culture’s exhibit “We Are Still Here And This is Our Story: Revisited.”

According to Charlene Johnson, Founder and Executive Director for Plenty Doors, Rose was instrumental in aiding the nonprofit in starting the annual Apsáalooke Community Market, assisted businesses in applying for the annual Indian Equity Fund, and completed a brochure highlighting local businesses and events on the reservation. Furthermore, Rose’s initiative in founding the Facebook page “All Native Nations Entrepreneurs” has provided a vital platform for promoting Native artists and businesses while disseminating valuable information on grants and entrepreneurship. Her efforts have established a foundation for Indigenous entrepreneurs to connect with a wider audience, reflecting her dedication to her community. Rose envisions Indigenous entrepreneurship as the key for Tribal communities to overcome challenges and prosper, both economically and spiritually.