

SACRED CREATIVITY

Reconciling, Healing, Enlightening

An Interview with Eastern Shoshone artist Talissa Abeyta

Bishop Paul-Gordon Chandler had the opportunity to interview emerging Eastern Shoshone artist Talissa Abeyta, who is based on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, and who is a participating artist in our GROUNDED exhibition.



Talissa Abeyta in front of her artwork during an exhibition

Talissa Abeyta is a Native American contemporary artist who is a descendant of the Eastern Shoshone, Northern Arapaho, and Paiute tribes. She was raised in Fort Washakie, Wyoming on the Wind River Indian Reservation.

Her artwork is defined as Native American aesthetic with contemporary design. The main component being ledger art, she executes the collaborations of acrylic paints, watercolors, and printmaking, and is intent on experimenting with art forms that are already established as well as with new forms of expression. A compassionate optimist, she is inspired by love, heritage, and life. Talissa feels very blessed to have the present-day experience of being a Native American woman, because it allows her to have a voice and the freedom to express her thoughts and emotions in her work without restraint. For Talissa, the best way to represent the love she has for her heritage and people is to create art that depicts Native Americans in beauty, grace, resilience, and strength. Through her art, she is showing the respect she has for individual expression, between and within Native American communities. With so much cultural diversity between tribes, she finds their individual uniqueness beautiful. Talissa aspires to reconcile, heal, and enlighten throughout her life's work.

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

Talissa: I have been creating for as long as I can remember. There was a time, however, when I cared too much about what others thought about my work, so unfortunately it was much later that I realized it was my life calling.

Yet, when I think back on it, I still wouldn't have done it any other way. It enabled me to get more life experience, and having experienced a period of my life without art, I appreciate it so much more.

What formative influences have shaped your life as an artist?

Talissa: My formative influence would definitely be my mentor, Matt Flint. Also long before that, my family, specifically my grandma. I learned to sew and bead when I was eleven. Designing beadwork and sewing my own jingle dresses taught me design and composition before I even knew what that was.



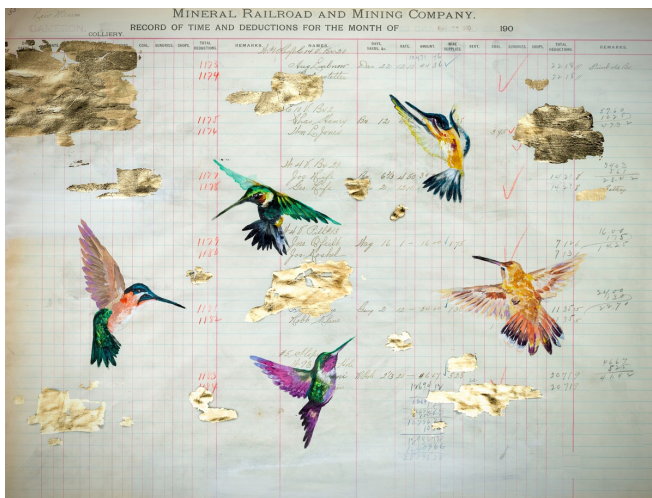
Talissa Abeyta, *Tranquil Path*, Acrylic painting on antique ledger paper

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

Talissa: I compose my pieces with modern imagery on antique ledger paper. My thoughts behind incorporating ledger paper into my work is more of paying homage to the original style* and what it means to me. Ledger art derived from a shortage of material and leather hides, and my fascination is in the fact that nothing was going to stop the narrative - our stories were still going to be told. The resilience and resourcefulness of this style of art captured my heart. I know everyone has their own interpretation of an art piece, but one thing I love about art is that its limitations are non-existent. Each artist has their own expression. My overall goal is just to remind everyone of the beauty in the world. I think a rich deeply rooted culture is a beautiful thing. I hope it's apparent that I have a love and appreciation for my culture through my work.

***Ledger art** is a term for narrative drawing or painting on the paper of ledger books. Ledger art flourished primarily from the 1860s to the 1920s. A revival of ledger art began in the 1960s and 1970s. The term comes from the accounting ledger books that were a common source of paper for Indigenous peoples predominately of the Great Plains during the late 19th century.

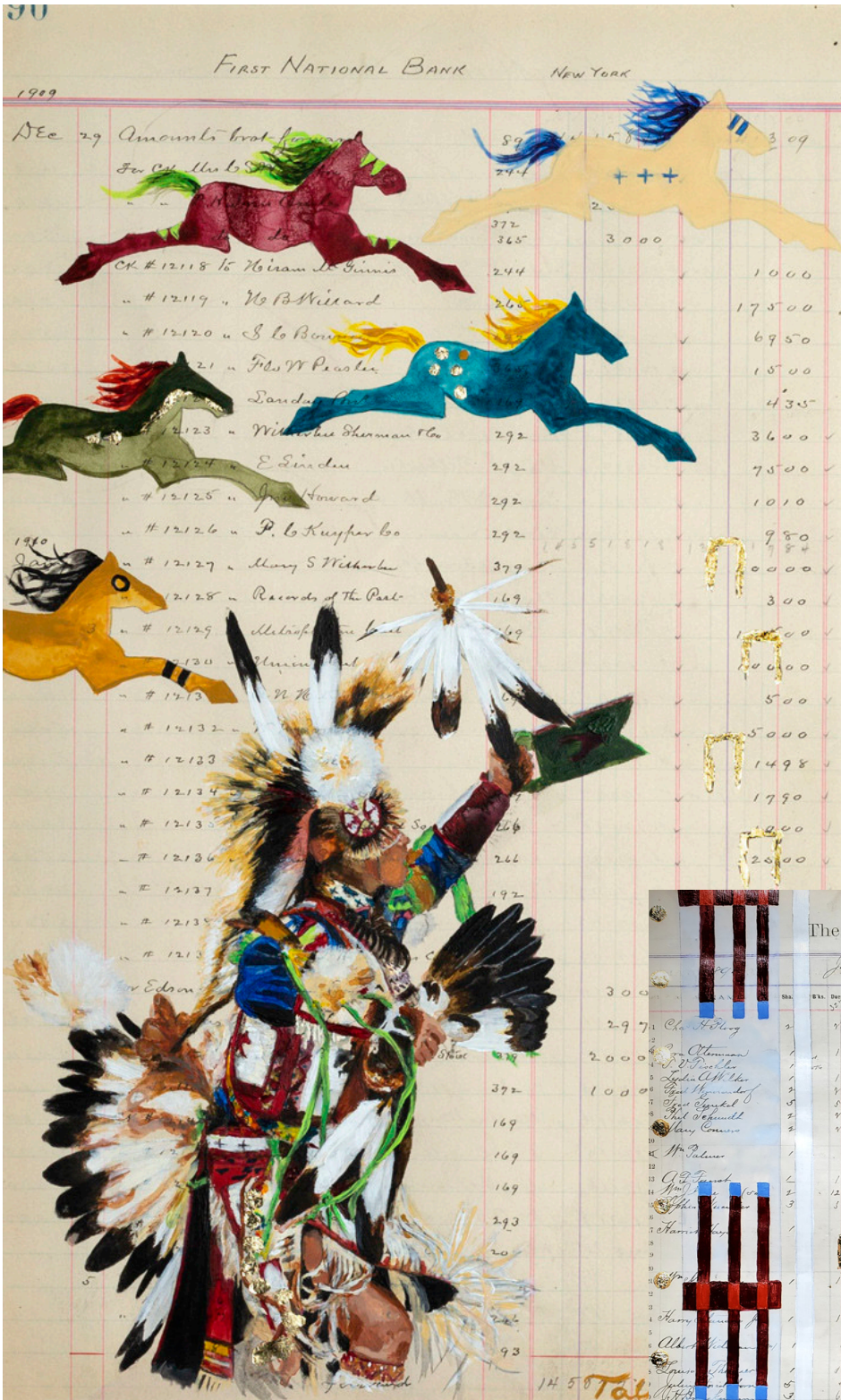
Talissa Abeyta, *Healers*, Acrylic painting on antique ledger paper



What do you feel Native Americans can offer our world today in regard to our connection to the earth and the importance of that connection?

Talissa: Native Americans have always had a sense of respect and balance, and I think that the wider world is learning that.

All thanks to social media, the last decade has really changed the perspective of a lot of people about Native Americans. What we took, we gave back and we respected Mother Earth because she provided for us.



Talissa Abeyta, *Chad Red Elk*,
Acrylic painting on antique
ledger paper

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

Talissa: I am excited and I am so grateful to be invited to be part of this exhibition. It is an absolute privilege to be showing alongside such inspirational artists. It's also so exciting to know this exhibition will be experienced by so many people. I want to send out positive vibes and healing, and this opportunity will hopefully allow my work to do that.

Talissa Abeyta,
Accelerating
Admiration, Acrylic
painting on antique
ledger paper





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

Talissa: I recently collaborated on a large wall mural in Lander, Wyoming with two other artists. Public art is meant to bring the community together, and it was really special to be a part of this project. I had previously only worked on small-scale works, so the 20-foot bison was a drastic switch up for sure.

