

2012 NATIVE AMERICAN SPECIAL ISSUE

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MAGAZINE

NATIVE ART STARS

SCULPTURE

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GILA PACK TRIP
THE APACHE WAY





Simpson poses in front of figures from her piece *Intellectual Conversation*, in VO Rezurrect jeans with leather appliqué.

BY ROSEMARY DIAZ

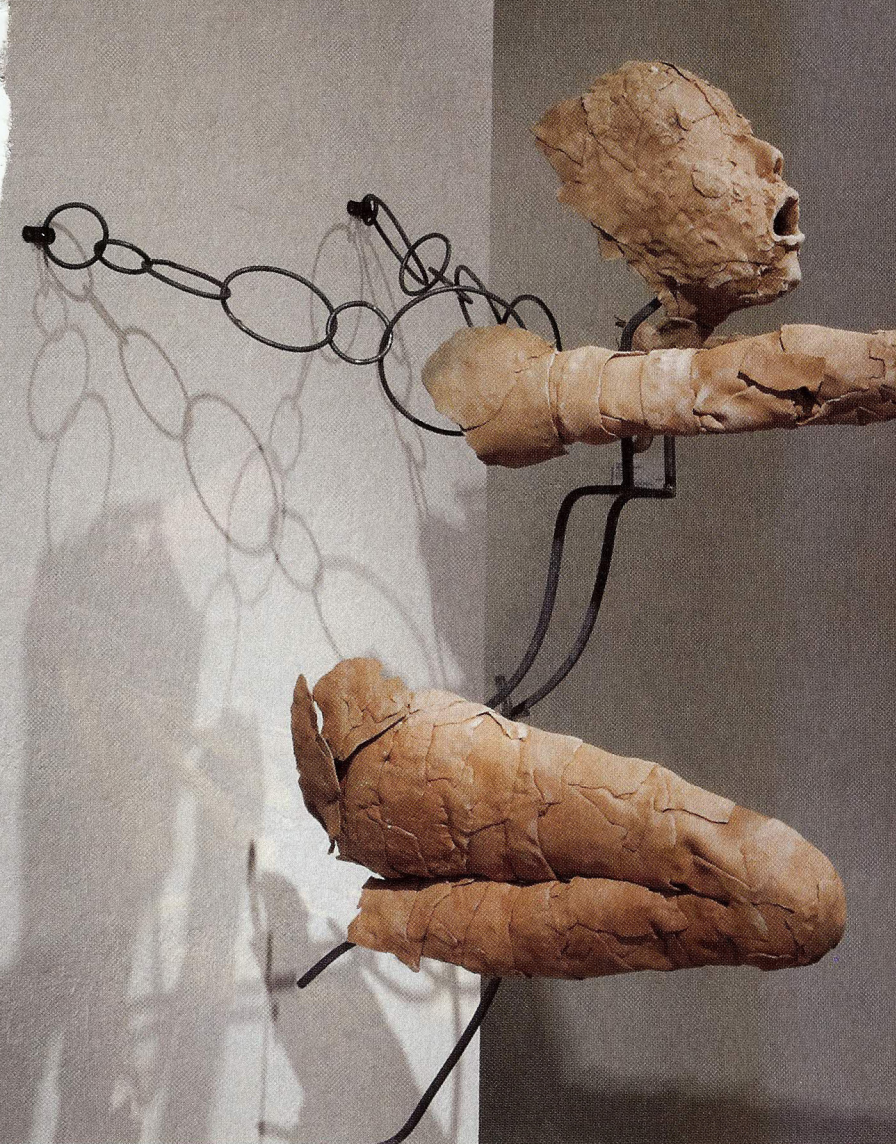
As emerging artists go, Rose B. Simpson has been coming on really strong really fast: Five years ago she was a college art student, playing in a band called Chocolate Helicopter. Now she's a delegate to Santa Fe's UNESCO Creative Capital sister city, Icheon, South Korea, and at 28 years old is one of the youngest artists represented by Chiaroscuro Contemporary Art, a major Santa Fe gallery. An *Albuquerque Journal* art critic praised Simpson's sculpture *Reach* (from her 2011 Chiaroscuro show) as being "as surefooted and convincing as a sculpture can be." Simpson's follow-up show, at the gallery through September 8, will, she promises, feature work inspired by "empowerment and freedom [rather] than attempting to understand life's complications."

Growing up at Santa Clara Pueblo in a family of world-renowned artists, writers, and poets, Simpson has been surrounded by art and creativity all her life. As a child, she often sat beside her mother, celebrated sculptor Roxanne Swentzell, as she worked with clay. Her father, Patrick Simpson, is an artist who works in metal and wood.

It all shows. Beyond the aesthetic strength of Simpson's art lies a powerful and profound sense of spirit and a deep, ever-flowing connection to the Pueblo culture of the Tewa people. Her work, she says, is all about challenging stereotypes and bridging gaps between the Indigenous and European cultures represented by her parents.

Simpson's early-childhood-as-master-class in clay work undoubtedly forged an extraordinary bond between the artist and the medium of clay. It also shaped her outside-looking-in perspective on mainstream culture. In an episode of *Artiside* on New Mexico PBS, Simpson expanded on the concept of media while sculpting feet and legs out of clay, her impassioned words never derailing the hypnotic movements of her hands: "I think a lot of media is really abusive to our consciousness. ... I work with

NATIVE INNOVATOR: SCULPTURE ROSE SIMPSON



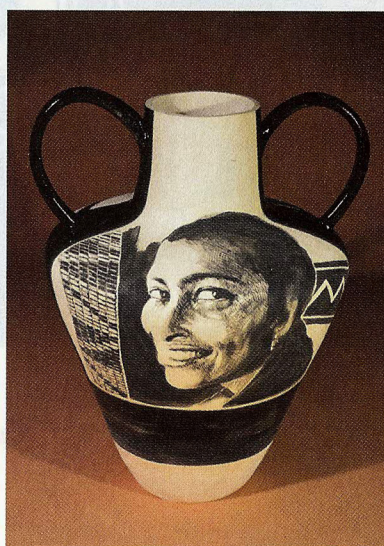
Reach (2011, ceramic, steel, 67 x 45 ½ x 27 inches) earned rave reviews. Simpson used an image of it on her master's graduation announcement to depict her process and desire, as an artist, "to delve deeper." Below: A detail of *To Be Pueblo*, an installation at Chiaroscuro Contemporary Art (2011, ceramic, adobe, wood, steel; 74 X 42 X 63 inches). See the complete work at chiaroscurosantafe.com.

COURTESY CHIAROSCURO GALLERY

media, media being comic books—even graffiti art is media. And how do you take control of the media and make it something positive that induces consciousness rather than unconsciousness? When I watch TV, I feel so detached from the earth, from the way I feel, from the things around me.

"I was homeschooled," she continued. "We grew all our own food. I wanted to be mainstream. We didn't have a television, I didn't get most of the jokes, but I did find my own perspective of seeing something. What my parents gave me—those perspectives—was a gift."

After attending the University of New Mexico for three years, Simpson studied Studio Arts at the Institute of American Indian Arts, receiving a BFA in 2007. Shortly thereafter, she enrolled at the Rhode Island School of Design,



Above: This edgy self-portrait, *Apology*, painted on the "canvas" of a traditional Santa Clara-style pot, is two-sided. The side not visible shows Simpson with a grimmer expression. To see her face's proportions undistorted, the pot must be viewed at just the right angle.



PHOTOS COURTESY ROSE SIMPSON

graduating in 2011 with a Master of Fine Arts degree in Ceramics. Last year's show at Chiaroscuro, *Thesis*, comprised RISD work. Its fragmented figures—"fierce and fragile," said the *Journal*—depicted human forms locked in struggle.

"My expression is a boil-over of soul, a reflection-provoking evolution," explained Simpson in her artist's statement. "By processing what is very personal, I may present a predicament, suspend disbelief, or explore an alternative in order to harmonize with humanity."

Simpson's greatest artistic influences include her aunt, prominent sculptor Nora Naranjo-Morse; her stepfather, Cochiti potter Diego Romero; and, of course, her parents.

"What is so brilliant and enjoyable about Rose is her ability to enrich the world around her," says Swentzell. "Everything in her world becomes more than a person, place, or thing. It is Rosie-infused: rich with meaning and feeling."

When asked where she sees herself and her work in the future, Simpson replies, "I see myself loving growing up, enjoying life and its gifts of experience more gracefully than before. I am already appreciative of how much my perception of the world has changed in the last few years. I am less reactionary and [more] open to view experiences as opportunities to learn something new, rather than judging them quickly. If I keep moving in this direction, the next 10 years or 20 years are going to be glorious, no matter what happens."

"I feel that if I can learn from something I make, maybe, just maybe, it can reach someone else in the way it reached out to me. If I feel awakened by a product of a creative experience, then I hope to awaken others, too."

See Rose B. Simpson's current show through September 8 at Chiaroscuro Contemporary Art. (505) 992-0711; chiaroscurosantafe.com

RoseMary Diaz is featured in "Storytellers," page 8.