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New Mexican Sculptor Featured in Fall Exhibition at the FJJMA

NORMAN, OKLA. – Sculptor Christine Nofchissey McHorse seems full of contradictions. The Navajo artist uses traditional methods to create ceramics that challenge the notion of traditional Native American art. As a resident of New Mexico, her works are being scooped up by non-Southwest art aficionados across the nation. And her new series, Dark Light, utilizes blackened clay that actually sparkles. The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma opens Dark Light: the Micaceous Ceramics of Christine Nofchissey McHorse Saturday, Sept. 14.

McHorse fires mica-rich clay she harvests from riverbeds in northern New Mexico to a black sheen that creates both sensuous shadows and highlights on her architectonic forms. Organic curves, smooth spirals and rounded folds adorn the large ceramic works in her exhibition.

McHorse is the fifth guest artist in the university’s Jerome M. and Wanda Otey Westheimer Distinguished Visiting Artist Chair program.

Interim museum director Mark White said McHorse’s Norman visit, which includes a week of classroom time in September with OU art students and a gallery talk for the community, reflects the mission of the museum and the endowment’s namesake.

“We are very grateful for the generous patronage of Mrs. Westheimer and her continued support of art and education at the University of Oklahoma,” he said. “Her endowment continues to combine art and education, and both the university and Norman communities will benefit from this unique opportunity. Christine McHorse is considered to be one of the most innovative forces in Native American pottery today. We are excited for this opportunity to share both the artist and her works with our visitors.”
McHorse is a leader in the continuing development of contemporary Southwestern ceramics. Rooted in timeless traditions like many of her contemporaries, McHorse uses the traditional Puebloan construction system she learned from her mother-in-law, Lena Archuleta of Taos. Harvesting clay by hand, McHorse coils the medium into forms that transcend historical precedents. As a formally trained artist, she exercises the freedom to reflect Navajo, Taos and other contemporary influences.

“Many Native artists have shrugged off the limitations of historicized ‘tradition,’ and as they actively practice their cultural traditions, they creatively respond to diverse contemporary influences,” said Heather Ahtone, the James T. Bialac Assistant Curator of Native American and Non-Western Art at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

For McHorse, this creative liberty results in forms that are as referential to Barbara Hepworth, Edward Weston and Georgia O’Keeffe as they are to natural gourds and flowers. By creating vessel-based art that is undecorated and abstract, McHorse’s work relates more to modern sculpture than to Southwestern culture. As a result, she has been collected both by contemporary art and Native arts collectors.

“Moreover, McHorse creates objects that speak within a distinctively 21st-century vernacular,” Ahtone said. “She challenges the potential of the clay’s structural limits and natural pliability to build forms that are organic, sculptural and architectonic.”

Without the distraction of surface treatments, the natural sheen of the black, mica-rich clay creates deep shadows and reflective highlights that suggest a “dark light.” Dark Light is the first traveling exhibition by McHorse and features works created since the series began in 1997. In addition to many of her full-bodied pieces, viewers can see original sketches and design plans on display.

Dark Light: the Micaceous Ceramics of Christine Nofchissey McHorse is organized by The Ceramic Arts Foundation, New York, N.Y., in association with Clark + Del Vecchio, Santa Fe, N.M., and is curated by Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio.

The exhibition is on display Sept. 14, 2013, through Jan. 12, 2014, in the Cy and Lissa Wagner Gallery on the museum’s first floor.

Educational programs are scheduled this fall at the museum, including a gallery talk with McHorse at 12:30 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 10; a guest lecture at 6 p.m. Friday, Sept. 13; and a family day from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 22. These programs are offered at no additional cost to the public.
Additional information about the exhibition and programs is available on the museum’s website at www.ou.edu/fjjma.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus. Admission to the museum is complimentary to all visitors, thanks to the generosity of the OU Office of the President and the OU Athletics Department. The museum is closed on Mondays. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938 or visiting www.ou.edu/fjjma.

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IMAGE CREDIT

A new exhibition of ceramics opens Sept. 14 at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. Dark Light: the Micaceous Ceramics of Christine Nofchisssey McHorse features works by the New Mexican artist from the past 15 years, including Nautilus 2006, shown here.

Christine Nofchissey McHorse (U.S., Navajo, b. 1948)
*Nautilus 2006*, 2006
Micaceous Clay, 18 1/2 x 10 1/2 in.
Collection of Garth Clark & Mark Del Vecchio, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
Photo by Addison Doty