



Allan Houser (1914-1994)

Raindrops, 1993

H. 60 x W. 34 x D. 46 inches, bronze, James A. Michener Art Museum, Gift of Mattiemae Silverman, in loving memory of Ira Silverman, who gave hope and inspiration to many.

Raindrops by Allan Houser

About the Artist

Allan Houser was born Allan C. Haozous on June 30th, 1914, in Oklahoma. Prior to his birth, his family—members of the Chiricahua Apache tribe—had been held as prisoners of war for 27 years. He spent his childhood working on a farm, where he was exposed to Chiricahua Apache traditions. His father, however, further encouraged Houser to pursue a formal education. In 1934, he enrolled as an art student at the Santa Fe Indian Art School, where he studied painting under Dorothy Dunn. In many of his early works, Houser depicted Apache ceremonies and society in a clean, flat, and linear style. By 1939, his work began to attract attention from the public; that year witnessed Houser exhibiting work at both the Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco and the New York World's Fair, as well as receiving a mural commission from the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. In 1939, Houser married Anna Marie Gallegos, a Navajo and Hispanic woman with whom he eventually had three sons. In 1940, Houser received a second mural commission from Washington.

Up until this time, Houser had primarily worked and built his artistic reputation as a painter. In 1938, however, Houser began to experiment with sculpture, perhaps encouraged by friend, colleague, and fellow muralist Olle Nordmark. His experimentation with media created a corresponding shift in his style, which became less traditional and more experimental around this time. In 1941, Houser and his family relocated to Los Angeles. There, he had the opportunity to view exhibitions of the work of Constantin Brancusi, Jean Arp, Jacques Lipschitz, and Henry Moore - artists whose style would come to influence Houser as a sculptor. In 1948, Houser received a Guggenheim Fellowship in the fine arts as well as his first commission for a public work of sculpture from the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. The work, titled *Comrade in Mourning*, an eight-foot-tall Carrara marble work, honored Native American students from Haskell who had died serving their country in the Second World War. Houser employed wood for many of his early sculptures, while later works often appear in stone or cast in bronze.

Many themes reappear throughout Houser's oeuvre, including the mother and child, warriors on horseback, and Apache fire dancers. Experimentation was another constant in Houser's work; he once stated in an interview that "It's what keeps you alive. I'd get bored if I did the same thing all the time." Similarly, although his style evolved over the course of his career, it consistently favored narratives related to his Native American heritage.

In 1951, Houser began his teaching career at the Inter-Mountain Indian School in Utah, where he would live as an artist in residence and instructor for eleven years. While teaching, Houser also illustrated seven children's books. During this time, Houser mostly worked on smaller sculptures in wood. In 1962, he returned to Santa Fe and became the first to teach sculpture at the newly-formed Institute of American Indian Arts. It was in Santa Fe that Houser's interests in media shifted from wood and stone to bronze, with sculptures becoming larger, more

monumental, and more stylized in the process.

Houser retired from his teaching position in 1975, allowing him to focus solely on his work as an artist. Following his retirement, Houser produced almost 1,000 sculptures, including *Offering of the Sacred Pipe*, commissioned by the US Mission at the United Nations in 1985, and *May We Have Peace*, which he presented to Hillary Rodham Clinton and in 1994. Houser continued sculpting until his death in Santa Fe in 1994.

During his lifetime, Houser received many awards and honors. In addition to the Guggenheim Fellowship in the fine arts, he received France's Palmes d'Academie in 1954, the State of New Mexico Governor's Award in 1980, the State of Oklahoma Governor's Award in 1983, and the National Medal of Arts in 1992.

His work is currently in the permanent collections of many museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the British Royal Collection in London, the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., and the Linden Museum in Stuttgart, Germany.

About *Raindrops*

Allan Houser completed *Raindrops* in 1993, toward the end of his career as a sculptor. The work can be found outside in the Patricia D. Pfundt Sculpture Garden at the Michener Art Museum. This work features a Native American female figure, possibly a girl or young woman, looking up to the sky with a resting sheep at her feet. The figure reflects Houser's Native American heritage, while the sheep's presence simultaneously evokes Houser's own childhood experiences on his family's farm. Many of Houser's other works depict similar Native American women gazing upward. Houser also incorporated animals in his work, such as *Homeward Bound* created in 1989, which also includes sheep.

Houser's creative spirit was nourished by nature, animals, and the landscape of the Southwest. Sheep were necessary animals for clothing and food for many Native American tribes. For the Apache, all animals are considered sacred beings to be treated with respect. The culture of the Apache is deeply rooted to their land and their environment. In the Apache belief system, the Sun and Mother Earth are physical representations of the Creator who is responsible for all life. The Apache understand that people cannot exist without energy forces like the sun, moon, wind and rain. *Raindrops* can be regarded as a symbol to represent this deep cultural heritage and belief system.

Women are regarded as vital in the Apache culture, so it is not surprising Houser frequently used the female form in his work. Not only are they the stronghold for the family, but Apache women planted corn and were also gatherers of food. Various kinds of ceremonies are performed to celebrate women called "dances", such as the Sunrise Dance. This Sunrise Dance is a way for the entire community to recognize and celebrate the meaning and value of

womanhood. There are also other dances, such as Rain dance, a Spirit Dance, and a Harvest and Good Crop Dance.

Raindrops was cast into bronze from an original 1993 steatite (or soapstone) carving. Therefore, this sculpture is not the original piece that Houser would have created with his hands. It is one of an edition of ten and still considered an original work of the artist. *Raindrops* is in the collection of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe in Connecticut. Bronze castings of *Raindrops* are included in the permanent collections of the Michener Art Museum and the North Dakota Museum of Art.

Looking Questions

- What do you see? Describe all the details of this work.
- Discuss the use of shape, line and texture in this sculpture.
- Describe the female figure, including her clothing, possible age, facial expression and posture. What do these visual elements tell us about the subject?
- What is the animal in this work? Why do you think Houser placed this animal at the figure's feet?
- Describe the figure's face. What might she be thinking? Why?
- Does the title, *Raindrops*, help you understand this work better? Why or why not?
- What does this object tell us about Houser's Native American heritage?
- Is there any symbolism in this sculpture? Why or why not?
- What do you feel is the most important part of this artwork? Why?
- What does the posture and stance of the figure communicate to us? Explain.
- If this sculpture could tell a story, what would it be?

Themes

Raindrops addresses a variety of themes for discussion and lesson planning. These include:

- Apache tribes, culture, customs, history and folklore
- Spirituality
- Abstraction and the human form
- Sculpture
- Symbolism
- The figure

Key Vocabulary

Abstract	Chiricahua Apache	Pattern	Symbol
Bronze	Custom	Sculpture	Texture
Cast	Figurative	Steatite	
Carving	Naturalism	Stylized	

Interdisciplinary Connections

Interdisciplinary connections can be made between *Raindrops* and a variety of subjects. The lesson plan ideas listed below for elementary through high school students are provided as a means to enrich your curriculum and make meaningful connections with the work by Allan Houser.

The *Raindrops* poster, for example, engages:

- Visual Arts
- Art History
- Language Arts/English
- Social Studies
- Math and Science

Visual Arts

- Think about what has been essential so far in your life—be it tangible, such as food and water, or intangible, such as an emotion or religion. Complete a drawing, painting, or sculpture illustrating your relationship to this essential item, quality, or entity.
- Using clay, created a figurative sculpture inspired by a character from Native American folklore or legend. Who is your character? What story is he/she trying to tell?
- For older students, investigate the process of casting or creating a mold. This could include a cuttlebone casting or a plaster cast from a oil-based clay sculpture.

Art History

- Look at Brancusi's *The Kiss* (www.philamuseum.org), Jacques Lipschitz's *Reader II* (www.philamuseum.org), and a work by Henry Moore. What similarities and differences do you see between Houser's *Raindrops* and these works?

- Many other artists from different times and cultures have made art objects depicting subjects similar to those of Houser's *Raindrops*. Consider *The Interrupted Sleep* by 19th century French artist François Boucher (www.metmuseum.org), *Girl with a Lamb* by 18th century French artist Jean-Baptiste Greuze (www.nationalgallery.org.uk), 17th century Dutch painter Adriaen van de Velde's *A Shepherd and Shepherdess with a Flock of Sheep* (www.philamuseum.org), and 20th century Finnish painter Hugo Simberg's *Girl and Lamb* (www.artstor.org). How are these paintings, all depicting a girl and a lamb, similar to or different to Houser's sculpture?
- Many art objects have existed throughout the ages that show people and animals. Choose at least three from each of the following cultures: Native American, European, African, Asian and South American. Develop a comparative project reflecting your findings. Why are animals and their relationships to people important in all these cultures?

Language Arts

- Write a short story about this Native American and her lamb. Where is she standing? What is she doing? Is she in a large field with other sheep? What will happen next?
- Write a poem describing a time when you were waiting for something, just like this figure could be waiting for rain. Did it ever come? Why or why not?
- Think about the sculpture's title, *Raindrops*. What does rain mean to you? What does it mean to the female figure Houser has created? What could rain be a symbol for? Write an one-act play using your point-of-view or the figure's, and act it out with your classmates.

Social Studies/History

- Allan Houser grew up experiencing Chiricahua Apache traditions, despite the persecution of his heritage by the United States government. Can you find specific examples in *Raindrops* that make connections between Houser's work and his culture? What customs and beliefs are shared by the Chiricahua Apache in particular?
- Research the Apache tribal nation, their origins, and their geographic locations. How are these tribes similar or different? What are their origins? What makes each of them unique? Do any of them survive today?
- Women play a vital role in Apache culture. They are the teachers and stronghold for the family. Research this topic and report on your findings in a visual presentation. Are there notable Apache women in history?

Math and Science

- To create a sculpture of this size, a proper amount of bronze would had to have been measured to pour it into the mold. Look up the cost of casting grain. Estimate by weight how much it would be been used to create it.
- Think about the figure's relationship to the sheep. Do you see a connection between the figure and the sheep as they relate to one another in the natural world? Why might the figure have the sheep? What might she provide for it?
- How is rain created in our earth's atmosphere? What is its impact? How does global warming affect it? Examine the process and report on your findings.

More Michener Connections

Discover these additional works and/or artists either at your next visit to the Michener or the Museum's online collections database to compare and contrast them with the work of Allan Houser:

- *Red Earth Dancer* by Doug Hyde (on view in the Pfundt Sculpture Garden)
- Charles Hargens
- Edward Hicks

Works Cited

"A Tribute." *Allan Houser*. Allan Houser, Web. 02 Sept. 2012.
www.allanhouser.com/tribute.php.

"Allan Houser, 80, A Sculptor Known For Apache Themes." *The New York Times* [New York] 25 Aug. 1994, Obituaries: Web. 02 Sept. 2012. www.nytimes.com/1994/08/25/obituaries/allan-houser-80-a-sculptor-known-for-apache-themes.html.

"Allan Houser." *Smithsonian American Art Museum*. Smithsonian Institution, 1996. Web. 02 Sept. 2012. www.americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artist/?id=6734.

Metropolitan Museum of Art Collections. Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d. Web. 07 Sept. 2012.
www.metmuseum.org/collections.

National Museum of the American Indian Collections Search. National Museum of the American Indian, Web. 02 Sept. 2012. www.nmai.si.edu/searchcollections/home.aspx.

National Gallery Collections: Paintings. National Gallery, n.d. Web. 07 Sept. 2012
www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings.

Philadelphia Museum of Art Museum Collections. Philadelphia Museum of Art, n.d. Web. 07 Sept. 2012. www.philamuseum.org/collections.

Rushing III, H. Jackson. *Allan Houser: An American Master (Chiricahua Apache, 1914-1994)*. NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2004.

Silberman, Arthur. "Houser, Allan." *Grove Art Online*. *Oxford Art Online*. 3 Sep. 2012. www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T039095.

The Apache Tribe: The Dream and Reality. Apache Tribal Nation. Web. 24 June 2011. www.greatdreams.com/apache/apache-tribe.htm

Tiller-Velarde, E. Veronica. *Culture and Customs of the Apache Indians*. Greenwood Publishers, 2010.

Native American Net Roots. "The Navajo, Sheep and Federal Government". Nov. 10, 2011. www.nativeamericannetroots.net/diary/1136. 5 Sept . 2012.

"Navajo Cultural History and Legends." Nov. 2002. www.redshift.com/~bcbelknap/natani/navajovalues.htm#navajobeliefs 5 Sept . 2012.

This teaching poster was produced by the Education Department at the James A. Michener Art Museum and was generously supported by funding through the Target Corporation. Copyright © 2013, James A. Michener Art Museum.

