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**From carving ice to carving Katsina**

**Quotskuyva: Dream was 'catalyst that got me started'**



Mudheads in Love, by Lake Montezuma artist Gerry Quotskuyva.  
Courtesy photo

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RIMROCK - Before Hopi artist Gerry Quotskuyva carved Katsina figures, he carved ice.

Quotskuyva, a resident of Rimrock, managed a restaurant's kitchen in the early 1980s.

"They hired a guy to do ice sculpting," Quotskuyva recalls. "We got along well. Then I trained with him."

Quotskuyva learned the art of sculpting ice more than a decade before his dream of a Katsina Corn Maiden, a Hopi symbol of fruition and spiritual wealth. The dream was Quotskuyva's inspiration to carve Katsina figures.

"When it comes to the creation of my product, a lot of [my artistic direction] has to do with visions," Quotskuyva says. "The wood talks to me. Sometimes I'm waiting to see what comes out of it. Sometimes it is a vision."

Today, Quotskuyva is an esteemed Hopi artist who shows his work in galleries and museums nationwide, with some of his work currently on display at the Arizona State Museum in Tucson, in museums in Indianapolis and Cincinnati, and at Mesa Verde National Park, near Cortez, Colo. In fact, Quotskuyva once served as artist in residence at Mesa Verde National Park.

"Gerry's ancestors were ones who built their homes into the cliffs," says Coella Drenke, facilities management specialist with Mesa Verde National Park. "Who better than one of Hopi descent to create artwork for Mesa Verde? His Katsinas are very large and colorful and he is multi-talented in the fact he does wonderful dioramas. His knowledge of the Hopi people is special, too."

A collection of his Katsina is currently on exhibit at the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis. The late Margot Eccles, a long-time Indianapolis philanthropist and arts supporter, donated the collection to the museum. Quotskuyva has been a featured artist at the museum's annual Indian Market & Festival, held each June.

"Gerry is important to our museum because a major area of our focus is to present the art, history, and cultures of Native North America, and he is a notable Hopi artist," says James H. Nottage, vice president and chief curatorial officer, Gund Curator of Western Art, History, and Culture for the Eiteljorg Museum. "He brings his unique personal experiences as a human being and his unique skills as an artist to represent the Hopi story. Visitors who meet him at the market or see his work in the museum are given a special opportunity to appreciate and learn about the Hopi and are reminded that the Hopi are not just of the past, but are a vital, living culture of today."

Quotskuyva's current carvings echo his original vision of the Katsina Corn Maiden.

"My work continues to evolve," Quotskuyva says. "What I do now is a much more refined version."

"I think it is wonderful to see artists like Gerry continue to grow and to even explore other media," says Andrew Higgins, Assistant Ethnological Collections Curator for Arizona State Museum. "I personally like how his dolls are not too busy and are graceful. His artistic style fits perfectly into the contemporary sculpture."

When Quotskuyva started carving, he says, his painting "was rough. [But] when I began painting for therapy, my carving also evolved. I began putting my carvings into my paintings."

One of Quotskuyva's new pieces is a painting with a carving inset.

"I tend to push the boundaries a little bit in my Hopi art," he says. "I'm not a traditional Hopi carver."

Quotskuyva carves. Quotskuyva paints. Quotskuyva also works in bronze. "I've won as many awards for my paintings as I have my carvings," he says.

Quotskuyva works in multiple media, he says, because not all of his ideas can be executed in a single format.

"An artist who limits himself to one medium restricts their expressive abilities," he says. Quotskuyva's non-traditional leanings "had to do with the fact that I didn't start doing this until my mid-30s. By the time I started carving, I had traveled a lot, gone to college, had a different view than only Hopi."

Quotskuyva is not formally trained in any artistic style. He says that many art students do not develop their own artistic vision, instead they choose to imitate their teachers' work. Quotskuyva says students can be "pushed in a direction to make sales."

Quotskuyva pushes himself from the moment he wakes up, but not because of sales. His art sells because it is good.

"Once I have had my breakfast, I go until I feel like I have accomplished something," Quotskuyva says. "Before I had my own studio, if I was bored at home, I would be in the home studio. So having my own studio helps separate personal time from my art."

Having his own working studio is not the only change in Quotskuyva's art.

"After 20 years of doing what the collectors expect of Hopi art, I'm branching in other directions," he says. "One of the things with bronzes, I was told to never cast the Katsina in bronze. When you are carving them, you are bringing them to life. Bronze is a cold, hard metal, so it is a challenge to me to bring the energy into that work."

Earlier this year, Arizona State Museum featured Gerry as its featured artist. The museum also had one of his carvings on exhibit for close to six months.

"Gerry is a very charismatic artist and it is always a pleasure talking with him about his artwork," Higgins says. "I believe this is a really important quality because when people ask him questions, he happily responds. The museum has an extensive Katsina doll collection that is often used by artists and scholars for books, inspiration, etc."

"It is very important to document the evolution of Katsina dolls as they have changed in style, form, paint, etc., throughout the years," Higgins adds. "Gerry's work is not only beautiful, but helps show the evolution of Katsina carvings. He also creates wonderful bronzes and paintings."

"This year has been a phenomenal year for me," Quotskuyva says. "I have been the featured artist at two museums. I've won Best of Show in two competitions, which is amazing for a carver. I am happy with where I am at and where I want to be going."