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Commemorating Piestewa

Richard Nilsen

The Arizona Republic

Jun. 3, 2004 12:00 AM

Kurt Joachim von Behrmann is a one-man band, culturally speaking.

"My mother was African-American and Native American with a little Anglo thrown in, too. My father was very, very German. He was in the war, that's how German he was. Gave him a gun and told him to go fight the Russians."

He was also a writer and artist and spoke seven languages.

His grandfather was Oglala Sioux from Montana.

"When you are as multicultural as I am, you become open to things and you look at the world a little differently," von Behrmann says.

The artist was born in Stuttgart, Germany, 42 years ago and has traveled the world since.

"I had a chance to visit the world before I was 12," he says. "Africa, South America. We had a villa in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. That opened my eyes to the world and what people are like."

Von Behrmann has created a memorial to Army Spc. Lori Piestewa, who was killed in Iraq in 2003 and was the first Native American woman killed in battle as an American soldier.

"As an artist and resident of Arizona, I felt that contemporary visual art needed to address Lori Piestewa with a fitting memorial," he says. "Lori Piestewa has become a figure of great significance to people, and I wanted to create a unique work of art that honors her memory and her importance as a national symbol."

The work is part painting, part sculpture. The artist calls it "almost totemic."

"I like the idea of commemorating things," he says. "Artists created paintings to commemorate events: the crowning of Napoleon, George Washington crossing the Delaware. You don't really see that anymore. But you assimilate what has happened; that's what art does."

The work will be showing at Paulina Miller Gallery for this First Fridays evening tour.



Photo courtesy of Kurt von Behrmann

Kurt von Behrmann's memorial to Piestewa is part painting, part sculpture.

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"I go to First Fridays regularly," von Behrmann says. "I've missed only one or two since they began. It's like a party atmosphere, lots of people, music, almost like a carnival, more like an elaborate town party. You have the opportunity to see people you haven't seen in a while."



DETAILS: The work of Kurt von Behrmann is up at Paulina Miller Gallery, 817 N. First St., Phoenix. 1-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays and 7-10 p.m. on the First Friday of each month. (602) 307-9643, www.paulinamillerstudiogallery.com.

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