

Betty LaDuke (1933-)

By Kristi L. Russell

Oregon artist and writer Betty LaDuke has gained an international reputation for her murals, paintings, and sketches. Her work tends to express socialist progress and life's continuity, from images of America's civil rights struggles, such as *Play Free* (1968), to women's struggles for survival in war-ridden spoiled lands, such as *Eritrea/Ethiopia: Where Have All the Fathers Gone* (1998). Other thematic elements in LaDuke's work include animals, rituals, and celebrations, which she uses to illustrate similarities among geographically and traditionally disparate cultures.

Born on January 13, 1933, in the Bronx, New York, to Jewish parents Sam and Helen Bernstein, Betty LaDuke knew she would be an artist by the time she was nine years old. At age sixteen, she enrolled in the High School of Music and Art in New York; she continued her education at Denver University, the Cleveland Institute of Art, and the Instituto Allende in Mexico. During the 1950s, she was commissioned by the Mexican government to paint the outer walls of one-room schools. She graduated from California State University in Los Angeles in 1963 with a special secondary art teaching credential and a master's degree in printmaking.

LaDuke's daughter, Winona LaDuke, a writer, activist, and environmentalist, was born in 1959. Winona's father, Vincent (Sun Bear) LaDuke, customarily enrolled her as a member of the White Earth tribe. Betty LaDuke married entomologist Peter Hughes Westigard in 1965 (1933–2011); their son Jason was born in 1970.

From 1964 to 1996, LaDuke taught at Southern Oregon University, where she was the university's second woman art teacher and for eighteen years the only woman in the Art Department. In an effort to raise the profile of women and international artists, she initiated courses on "Women and Art" and "Art in the Third World," and her exhibitions highlighted those themes, including *Landscape: A Feminine Mythical View* at Willamette University in 1977. LaDuke also published a series of books documenting the art of non-European women, including *Compañeros, Women, Art, and Social Change in Latin America* (1985) and *Africa: Women's Art, Women's Lives* (1991).

From 1975 to the 1980s, LaDuke's research included exploring world art and documenting the experiences of women in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. She traveled extensively to develop a series of sketchbooks that formed the basis for her larger works and exhibitions, and she received commissions to create murals such as the 100-foot-high sequence *Dreaming Cows* (2009) for Heifer International, whose mission is to end world hunger and poverty.

LaDuke continues to travel internationally and to create and exhibit her work in the region. Her exhibitions include *Bountiful Harvest: From Land to Table* (2015), a series of wood panels celebrating Oregon's farms and farmworkers; *Celebrating Life: Betty LaDuke Retrospective* (2013–2016); *Turtle Wisdom* (2021), twenty-four painted wood turtle sculptures that touch on themes related to the "Personal, Political, and Playful"; *Fire, Fury and Resiliency: Totem Witnesses and Turtle Wisdom* (2022); and *Bringing the World Together: Select Paintings, Etchings, Panels, 1953–2023* (2023).

LaDuke received the Oregon Governor's Award in the Arts in 1993 and the National Art Education Association's Ziegfeld Award for distinguished international leadership in 1996. Her artwork can be found in galleries and collections throughout Oregon, including the Coos Art Museum, the Grants Pass Museum, the Hallie Ford Museum of Art, the Portland Art Museum, Pacific University, the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, and Southern Oregon University. She lives in Ashland.

Sources

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The Oregon Encyclopedia

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