

I am Johnnie Lee Diacon. I am an enrolled member of the Mvskoke (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma, the Raprakko Etlwa (Thlopthlocco Tribal Town), and I am Ecovlke (Deer Clan). I was born in Okemah, Oklahoma to Margaret Harjochee (Creek) and Cecil Iron (Osage) on January 8, 1963. I now reside in Tulsa, Oklahoma and I am married to Nikki Stephens Diacon. I am the father of five children; Mika, Chrissa (deceased), Melissa, Annabelle (deceased), and Emerson. I have two grandchildren; Mai-Lin and Makoto.

After the death of my mother, I was adopted by Delmer "Bud" Diacon (Cherokee) and Helen Amos Diacon in 1967. Delmer Diacon was from Okemah and a friend of my family. The elder Diacon was a sign painter and graphic artist by trade, and it is through the work of my new father that I was introduced to art at a young age. We moved from Miami, Oklahoma to Springdale, Arkansas, and it was here that it was discovered that my eyesight was poor. The optometrist that I was sent to was an avid collector of Traditional Flat style paintings, and it was my first exposure to this style of art.

In a February 1995 interview for the book *Vision and Voices: Native American Paintings from the Philbrook Museum of Art* by Lydia L. Wyckoff, I was quoted as relaying my experience at the optometrist, "The first time I remember seeing traditional painting was when I was little. I had to go to the eye doctor and he had a bunch of paintings....I couldn't see real good and he fixed my eyes and (afterward) I could really see (the paintings). They stuck in my head." Due to my new father being Cherokee and having close ties with my biological family and frequent trips to Oklahoma, I had maintained close ties with my Indian heritage. I worked with my father for many years assisting him with the sign business until his retirement in 1980. It was around this time that I began to enter Indian art competitions as a self-taught artist in such shows as the Trail of Tears Art Show in Tahlequah, Oklahoma and the Red Cloud Indian School Art Show in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. It was from my initial introduction as a child to Indian art and the success and recognition from entering Indian art competitions that I decided to move back to Oklahoma and seek formal art training.

I received my post-high school education in art at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma, where I studied the Traditional, Flat, or Bacone School style of Indian painting under master artist Ruthe Blalock Jones (Delaware/Shawnee/Peoria). Usually my traditional works are spiritual and ceremonial depictions which are done in the Bacone School, or Flat style of Indian Art. These works are most often done in tempera and gouache on illustration board or watercolor paper, but in recent years some of this style of work has been rendered in acrylic on stretched canvas. I also studied mural painting at Bacone College where I have a mural hanging in Samuel Richards Hall. I

often work in larger formats as well as smaller canvases. At Bacone College I also studied silversmithing and bronze casting.

After graduating from Bacone with honors, I studied art at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma in their Bachelor of Fine Arts program for a semester before being accepted and transferring to the BFA program at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas. While at the University of Arkansas, I was fortunate to take three semesters of watercolor painting with master artist Robert Ross, who was at one time a student of Josef Albers. I was three semesters short of earning my BFA from the UA when I transferred to the Institute of American Indian Arts located in Santa Fe, New Mexico, to study the Contemporary style of Indian Art. Among my teachers at IAIA were Linda Lomahaftewa (Hopi/Choctaw), Karita Coffey (Comanche), and Melanie Yazzie (Navajo).

My contemporary style of work is usually done on gessoed board or stretched canvas using either acrylics or oils. These works often depict some of the secular life ways of modern Native Americans and due to my involvement with the American Indian Movement and recently with Idle No More and the No DAPL (Dakota Access Pipeline) movement, can often be political in nature. Both my Traditional and Contemporary styles often focus on my people the Mvskoke (Creek). In a quote from Patrick D. Lester's "The Biological Directory of Native American Painters" I was quoted as saying, "I feel comfortable with both traditional and contemporary styles. In my contemporary works I usually have a traditional theme." I have also been quoted as saying, "By the honest portrayal of my people, I hope to break some of the stereotypes that many people have when they think about Indians." In addition to painting and other two-dimensional forms, I also do bead work and some three-dimensional assemblage works.

I took a 14-year break from art after the death of two of my children, Annabelle in 2000 and Chrissa in 2008, and I recently returned to painting. After attending the Eagle Days event in January 2014, I received what I believe to be a sacred message from the Creator to begin painting again. The Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma has developed the Bah Kho-Je Xla Chi (Grey Snow Eagle House), an eagle rehabilitation program, and they had sent a couple of eagles to this event. These eagles have suffered serious injuries and are not able to return to the wild. While viewing these sacred birds, I received this message from them, "no matter how bad one has been hurt, we are still what the Creator has made us and with faith and the help of many we continue to do as He wishes using the gifts that He has bestowed on each of us".

My work has been associated with several different periods of the Native Fine Art Movement through the years, from The Bacone Period (1935-present), Five Civilized Tribes or Southeastern Period (1935-present), and the Post Rockefeller IAIA Period (1959-present).

My work is in the permanent collections of Bacone College, Muskogee, Oklahoma, the Creek Council House Museum Okmulgee, Oklahoma, Institute of American Indian Arts Museum of Contemporary Indian Art Santa Fe, New Mexico, The Philbrook Museum of Art Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Dr. J. W. Wiggins Native American Art Collection at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's Sequoyah National Research Center Little Rock, Arkansas, and the Five Civilized Tribes Museum in Muskogee, Oklahoma. I have been an invited artist, workshop leader, and guest speaker at numerous shows from 1985 to present.

Some of my exhibitions include; "We Are All Connected: The Native American Experience/Long Island, New York And Beyond" Hofstra University Hempstead, New York (1998), "Reflections: Contemporary Native American Art" Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indiana (2001), "Seeking the Sacred: Religious Ritual in Native American Art" Philbrook Museum of Art Tulsa, Oklahoma (2012), and the group show "Ancient Visions and Contemporary Voices: Paintings From Indian Country" which was at the David W. Mullins Library on the Campus of the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville (2016) and from there it traveled to The Paseo Plunge in Oklahoma City's historic Paseo Art District (2017). One of the last shows before my early and temporary retirement was a one man show in 2002 with the Department of the Interior Indian Arts and Crafts Board Southern Plains Indian Museum in Anadarko, Oklahoma. In 2012 I was asked to be the Artist in Residence for the Broken Arrow Public Schools Indian Education Department in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. I am a member of the Southeastern Indian Artist Association (SEIAA). I was one of nine Indigenous artists and writers whose works appear in the graphic novel compilation "Tales of the Mighty Code Talkers Volume 1", published by Native Realities Press in 2016. This book was selected as the December 2016 Book of the Month by the national call in radio program, Native America Calling. In February of 2018 The American Indian Library Association (AILA), an affiliate of the American Library Association (ALA), awarded Tales of the Mighty Code Talkers Volume 1 with a 2018 Youth Literature Award for Best Middle School Book. It also was listed as one of the 2018 Great Graphic Novels for Teens by the Young Adult Library Services Association. Currently I am working on a graphic novel titled "Relocation" which is a fictional account of an Oklahoma Indian family's experience during the 1960s Bureau of Indian Affairs Relocation program and the birth of the Red Power movement. I also produce an

occasional zine, Ghost Dance, which is based on the Paiute holy-man Wovoka's 1889 prophesy and the effects that it has when it comes to realization in modern times. I was invited by Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas to be part of the focus group for their recent traveling exhibition, Art for a New Understanding Native Voices 1950 to Now. In 2018 I partnered with the Museum of Native American History (MONAH) in Bentonville, Arkansas to present a workshop on the flat style American Indian painting as part of the museum's Creative Visions: Native American Arts Workshop series. I also co-curated the MONAH's first exhibition of contemporary art, Native Visions Now: Contemporary Works of Indigenous Artists of Oklahoma. I had the honor of having my art on the jacket for the upcoming book of poetry by the Mvskoke poet, musician, author, and 23rd U.S. Poet Laureate, Joy Harjo, which is titled An American Sunrise, published by W.W. Norton in August 2019. In March of 2019 I had the honor to be a Guest Artists in Residence for the Bacone College School of Indian Art.