

SHAN GOSHORN

Eastern Band Cherokee, born Baltimore, MD, 1957, died Tulsa, OK, 2018

Cherokee Burden Basket: A Song for Balance, 2012

Arches watercolor paper, archival inks, and acrylic paint, 18 3/4 x 18 3/4 x 23 1/4 inches
Purchased with a gift from Sandra Lynn Riggs and members of The Block Leadership Circle,
2017.3

After many years of working primarily as a painter and photographer, Shan Goshorn turned to basket weaving in 2008 as her primary mode of expression. Goshorn's conceptual baskets combine Cherokee aesthetics with thought-provoking content to address the links between historical events and ongoing struggles for Native American sovereignty and self-determination. Several of these works reference the fraught history of treaties between the US government and Native American nations, as well as the history of the Carlisle Indian Industrial Boarding School. In operation from 1879 to 1918, Carlisle served as the model for boarding schools across the United States that sought to assimilate Native American children through a process of forced acculturation.

Cherokee Burden Basket: A Song for Balance employs the form of a traditional Eastern Cherokee burden basket and variations of two weave patterns known as Chief's Daughter and Unbroken Friendship. Burden baskets were used to carry heavy loads such as produce or firewood. The artist's choice of this basket form underscores other types of burdens carried by Native American people referenced in the work.

The basket is woven from paper splints printed with excerpts from historical documents, including the Carlisle's mission statement, the Indian Removal Act of 1830, and the 1835 Treaty of New Echota, after which the Cherokee purportedly agreed to leave their territory in North Carolina for land in Oklahoma. The majority of Cherokee protested, claiming the treaty was invalid because the men who signed it on their behalf were not authorized to do so. Other splints are printed with stereotypical uses of Native names in commercial products, alcohol, and mascots, as well as statistics of domestic violence in Native communities. Black splints printed with excerpts from the New Testament written in Cherokee syllabics are woven throughout the work. These burdens are metaphorically acted upon by being interwoven with elements deemed healing, including four splints painted in the colors of the four sacred directions of Cherokee cosmology—red (east), black (west), white (south), and blue (north)—and printed with the words of Cherokee morning and evening songs performed to open and close the day in a balanced way.

—Janet Dees

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