

Reflecting spirit: Blackfeet artist's work on display in Missoula for next month

By **JODI RAVE** of the *Missoulian*



A sculpture titled "Guardian Spirits" by artist Darrell Norman is installed at its temporary home outside the Missoula Art Museum. It will be installed permanently in Browning in late May.
Photo by LINDA THOMPSON/Missoulian

Three "Guardian Spirits" took their place Thursday outside the Missoula Art Museum, looking and watching upon all those who pass by on the city streets and sidewalks.

"Guardian spirits reflect the spirits of our ancestors and the people who were the caretakers of this land for thousands of years," said Darrell Norman, a Blackfeet sculptor from Browning. "They are the protectors, the spirits who protect this land, a reflection of our culture, our history and the people themselves."

Norman's black metal sculptures of three spirits were installed on the north side of the Missoula Art Museum, the second outdoor art piece to grace the public display area. The art spot will eventually be expanded into a more formal platform, said Laura Millin, MAM director. Meanwhile, Millin and museum staff members said they were thrilled they could display Norman's work. "Organically, it's becoming a space where we can put these large, vibrant sculptures," said Rene Taaffe, MAM education curator.

The "Guardian Spirits" piece will remain outside the museum for about one month before it is permanently installed on the Blackfeet Reservation outside the Lodgepole Gallery and Tipi Village, a business owned by Norman.

"It's nice to have these sculptures because Darrell Norman has mostly worked with traditional materials in a very traditional way," said Taaffe. "This is a nice departure from that, so it fits in nicely with our mission of promoting contemporary art as well as showing his strong awareness of Native spirituality."

He will be in Missoula selling his work as part of an artist showcase during the Montana Indian Business Alliance conference Monday and Tuesday at the Hilton Garden Inn. He is also scheduled to be at the MAM on May 1, for a meet-and-greet with art patrons that coincides with the First Friday downtown art and gallery walk.

Norman has worked with Blackfeet tribal art forms and imagery for the last two decades, returning to the Blackfeet Reservation in 1991 after living in the Seattle area for 36 years. He opened the Lodgepole Gallery in 1993, where he promotes fellow artists' work.

Among his accomplishments, Norman received the Community Spirit Award in 2002 from the First Peoples Fund, an organization that supports the indigenous expression of Native artists.

The First Peoples Fund also gave Norman two business leadership awards in 2004 and 2009. The latter award allowed him to complete "Guardian Spirits," an 8-by-10-foot metal structure, a piece inspired by petroglyphs - ancient art carved into rocks.

"Darrell does both contemporary and traditional," said Doug Olson, a Missoula sculptor who works on projects with Norman. "He was influenced in Seattle by the contemporary sculpture work. Then he moved to Browning and he was influenced by the traditional art. He has a wide swath he cuts."

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