

# A Land of Many Gifts

The third and final sculpture in the Nez Perce series is "*A Land of Many Gifts*". Years ago, when exhibiting at the Cody Museum in Wyoming, we walked into the entrance to the story of the US Forest Service and above was their motto "*The Land of Many Uses*". On the opposite side of the museum entrance was a Native American cultural exhibit and their motto "*A Land of Many Gifts*". This more than gave me pause, it stopped me dead in my tracks. How one simple word could so profoundly reflect and define the contrast between cultures and attitudes toward our environment.

How something exists for our use, whether it is for pleasure or financial gains, or gifted to you by a higher power so that you may exist and flourish. Embracing acceptance and appreciation of the gifts of the land—a sculpture concept is born.

This was the first sculpture in the Nez Perce series, and I struggled to define the elements and their composition. This struggle opened the door for "*Pure Freedom*" and "*Taking of a Soul*" sculptures and their completion.

In turn, their completion opened my mind to the understanding that these sculptures—more than anything—were a messenger to the deep spiritual beliefs of Native American culture. Only then, could the struggles of "*A Land of Many Gifts*" melt away.

What emerged was a Native woman waking to the day—stepping outside her lodge wrapped in an elk robe and kneeling to the rising sun. As the sun warms, she extends her hands to give thanks for these blessings.

The River's water that sustain all including the salmon and eel— The Wildlife—great and small—Vast open space for the wolf, eagle and man to roam—Old growth forests—Centurions of the Land.

Each corner reflect on the importance and understanding of plant life, shared for thousands of years, orally with each generation. Indian Hemp—string for bows, netting and sewing. Chokecherries—used in making pemmican. Tule—lodging, and the great Camas bulbs for the rich and nutritional meals and trade.

By happenstance, it seems each sculptural journey turns over a new layer for me to question, How'd that happen? Without purposeful intent, the compositional masses that contain the reliefs bear a very similar shape to a sacred rock mound known as the Heart of the Beast, the Nez Perce belief of creation.

Ken Newman Sculptures—July 2019