

# Bob Haozous

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In the opening frames of a 1992 documentary on the Chiricahua Apache sculptor Bob Haozous, who was born in 1943, the camera pans the surface of a red rusted iron wolf, silhouetted against a clear blue New Mexico sky. On the film's soundtrack a restless wind animates the moment. Piercing the animal's prancing body is a second silhouette, a small human figure captured in free fall, forever separated from safety, forever the color of a changing sky. The figure is there, but not really, framed in negative space. The wolf, teeth clenched, head cocked to the heavens, with a billowing plume for a tail, bristles with danger and delight. It is playful, but not really. *Wolf* (1987) is a singular work fraught with dramatic tension and shrouded in mystery, mute testament to a disquieting narrative that finds added expression in the tangle of tumbling human bodies falling all around the sculpture's base. Who are these people, and what is their story? There must be a story. All of Haozous's works have a story, a probing and critical narrative subtext that has remained remarkably consistent over the last four decades, regardless of medium: in the polished wood figurative studies from the 1970s, in the marble torsos and limestone busts of the 1980s, in the bullet-riddled pull toys and monumental steel sculptures of the late 1980s and 1990s, and in the mixed-media pieces of the new millennium that incorporate drawings, text and photography.

In each of these works, viewers are invited to think reflexively, considering a set of relationships, and more specifically, the loss of relationships, the separations that seem to plague our modern world, endangering our very existence: the separation of individuals from one another, in a vain search for personal fulfillment; the separation of individuals from communities and cultural traditions, leaving tribal peoples lost with no history, no heroes, and no foreseeable future, and leaving non-tribal peoples ignorant of past injustices and too accepting of shallow media stereotypes; and separation from the environment, as well as the attendant responsibilities that come with a necessary global stewardship.

Like his late father, the renowned Apache sculptor Allan Houser, Haozous—who received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland—demonstrates a superb technical proficiency in several media, a mastery of scale and a fearless artistic vision. Also like his father, Haozous has often fashioned images of Indian women to portray the basic human dignity of Native Americans. However, as a self-proclaimed political artist, with the wicked wit of a social satirist, Haozous has also employed the female form to ironically critique the flagrant abuse of such dignity and the abuse of the environment, in such pieces as *Ozone Madonna*, a commentary on the ravaging of the Amazon rainforest, in which a giant woman in a scanty bathing suit is threatened by a swarm of tiny cars, or *Earth Mother Once Removed*, in which a similarly clad Mother Earth supports a trash bin filled with metal cans.

Perhaps Haozous's best-known work is the cut-steel "billboard," *Cultural Crossroads of the Americas* (1996), erected on the grounds of the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. The piece addresses, among other things, the contentious issue of cross-border immigration. Despite a clause in the artist's contract allowing for minor changes to the work's design, Haozous was forced to remove a coil of razor wire added to the billboard's upper edge once the piece was in place. More recently, Haozous created large metal sculptures for Seahawk Stadium in Seattle, Washington and the City of Tampa, Florida.

In 2005 the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico held a major retrospective of Haozous's work, *Indigenous Dialogue*. This past summer, Haozous helped launch the communal artists website, [www.freeapache.com](http://www.freeapache.com).



*Ozone Madonna* by Bob Haozous, Chiricahua Apache, 1989. Paint, mahogany, steel. 57" x 24" x 12" (144.8 cm x 61 cm x 30.5 cm). Purchased with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Goldsmith Foundation. Courtesy of the Heard Museum, Phoenix, Arizona. Cat. No. IAC2378. Photograph by Craig Smith.