



*Oscar Howe*

## *Dakota Images*

Lacking pencils and paper, young Oscar Howe used a stick to draw in the dust of South Dakota's Crow Creek Indian Reservation. He would display the same determination throughout his life, overcoming a multitude of obstacles to become a major figure in American Indian art.

Oscar Howe was born 13 May 1915 at Joe Creek to George T. Howe and Ella Fearless Bear, both Yanktonais Sioux. At the age of seven, he was sent to the Pierre Indian School. Within the next two years, his mother died, he was nearly blinded by trachoma, and a skin condition that caused painful, unsightly sores worsened. At age ten, he contemplated suicide. Howe was sent back to the reservation, where he slowly improved under the care of his maternal grandmother, who also taught him the Sioux traditions and symbols that would be vital to his work as an artist. He eventually returned to Pierre Indian School and in 1933, at the age of eighteen, graduated from the eighth grade. In 1935, suffering from tuberculosis, he left South Dakota for Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he began his formal art education. By the time he graduated as salutatorian from the Santa Fe Indian School's Studio of Indian Art in 1938, his works had been shown on both coasts and in Europe.

Howe returned to South Dakota and, in 1940, was assigned to the WPA's South Dakota Artists Project, which led to a scholarship to study mural painting at the Indian Arts Center in Lawton, Oklahoma. Beginning in 1942, he spent three-and-one-half years with the United States Army in North Africa and Europe. In 1948, Howe began designing the Mitchell Corn Palace murals and attending Dakota Wesleyan University, where he served as artist-in-residence and art department chairman before receiving his B.A. degree in 1952. After receiving his M.F.A. from the University of Oklahoma in 1954, Howe worked as art director for the Pierre public schools. His long association with the University of South Dakota in Vermillion began in 1957, when he became assistant professor of fine arts and artist-in-residence.

During his career, Howe received several honorary degrees and many art awards. In 1960, he was named South Dakota Artist Laureate. His internationally acclaimed works have been exhibited in numerous one-man shows and are included in many major collections. His illustrations appear in several books, and his murals adorn buildings in Mitchell and Mobridge, South Dakota; Nebraska City, Nebraska; and Hinsdale, Illinois. Oscar Howe, artist and teacher, died on 7 October 1983.

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