

# “Voices”

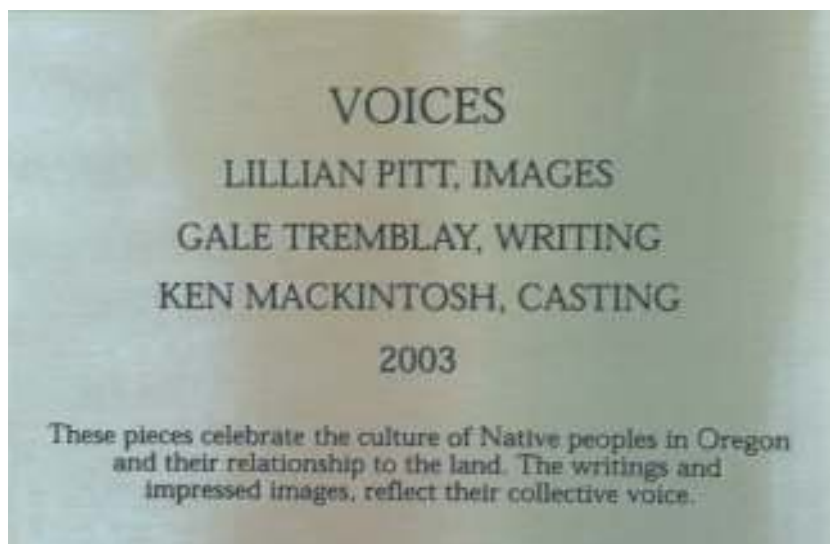
Since its opening in 1990, the Oregon Convention Center has become known for its extensive public art collection, which is valued at over two million dollars. For the Center’s 2003 expansion, ten artists were selected through a public invitation process to produce work for the center’s permanent collection, one of the largest and most varied convention center art programs in the country. Native American artist Lillian Pitt designed "Voices," a series of 26 bronze relief plaques in what will be the largest collection of a Native American’s artwork for a public space in the city.



The Portland Convention Center



Second floor hallway with commemorative plaques



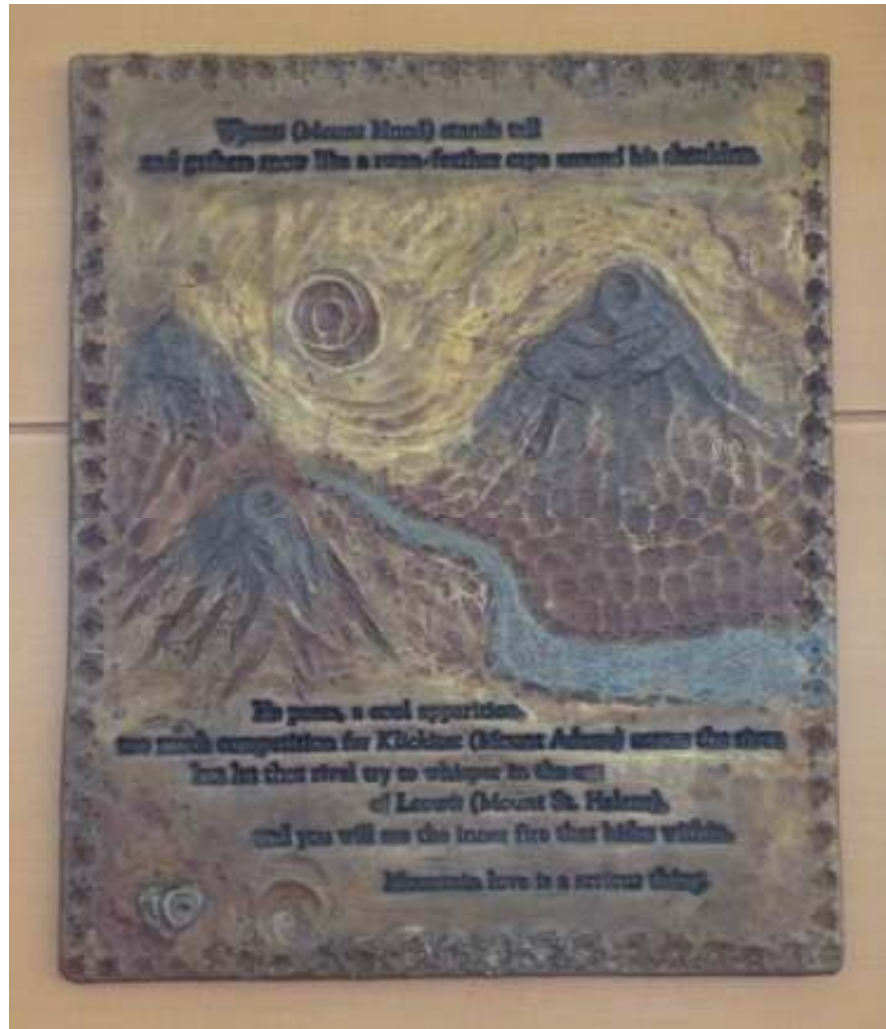


It is relationships that whisper us into this world –  
star to planet, earth to plant, plant to mammal,  
salmon swimming home to people generation after generation –  
making possible more life  
than most people ever dream about.



So many generations ago,  
Mount Mazama blew his top, darkening the sky for days

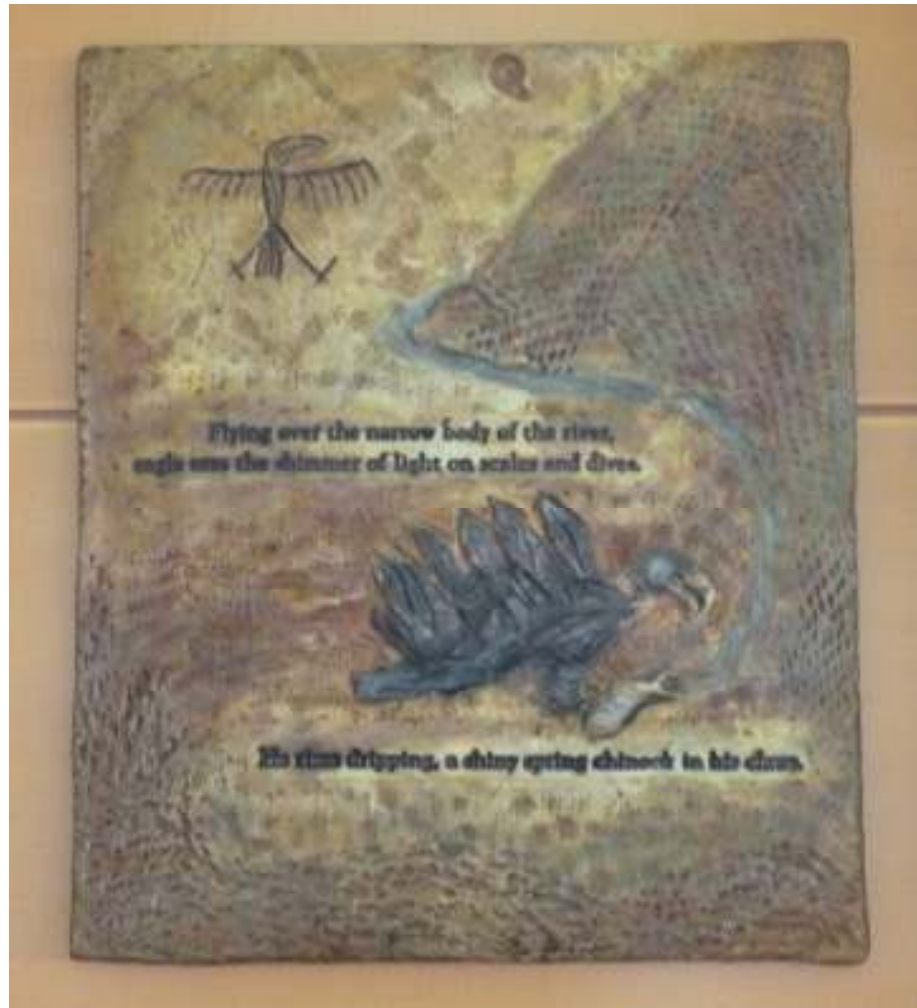
Only legends whisper of such things,  
stories as mysterious as the voice of the wind on water  
filling an ancient crater with a shimmering bottomless lake  
where a single icy tooth of land defines an island.



Wyeast (Mount Hood) stands tall  
and gathers snow like a swan-feather cape around his shoulders.

He poses, a cool apparition,  
too much competition for Klickitat (Mount Adams) across the river,  
but let that rival try to whisper in the ear  
of Loowit (Mount St. Helens),  
and you will see the inner fire that kindles within.

Mountain love is a serious thing.



Flying over the narrow body of the river,  
eagle sees the shimmer of light on scales and dives

He rises dripping, a shiny spring chinook in his claws.



Hunting on the shoulders of mountains,  
we learn to distinguish between the whistling of Stick Indians  
and the high piercing call of the elk,  
who, at times, feed and clothe the people,  
give them bones to carve into tools and magic forms  
that will delight the eye.



Once, they glided for miles  
on currents of air above the Chewana (Columbia).  
They cleaned the earth of the dead, rumbled like thunder,  
and spread their mighty wings to stir the air.

Now condors are twined into basket designs,  
one stitch after another over hours to keep memory alive.

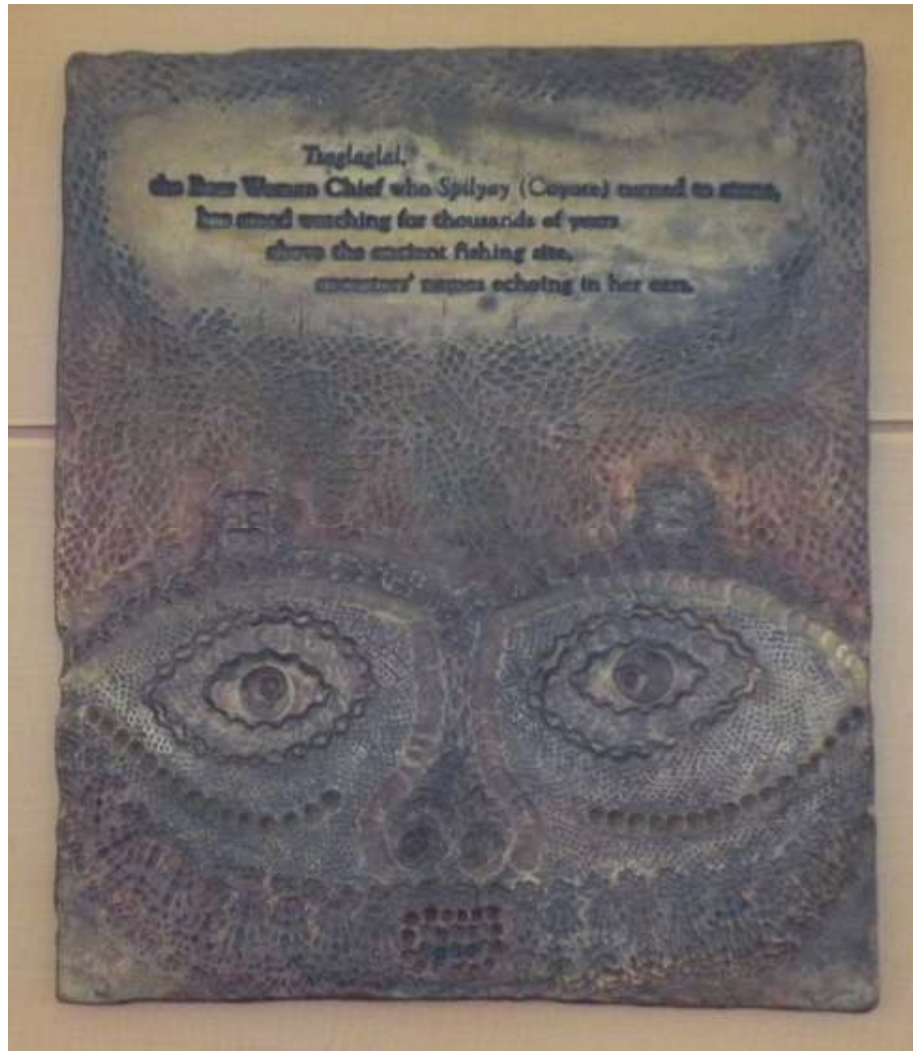


Mountain goats move in groups  
in the timeless rock glyphs that edge the gorge.

One marvels that some ancient artist  
could make such simple marks reveal a nature  
that has not changed in many centuries.

It is as though these stone goats were breathing just yesterday  
and climbing the steep banks by the river where we lay.



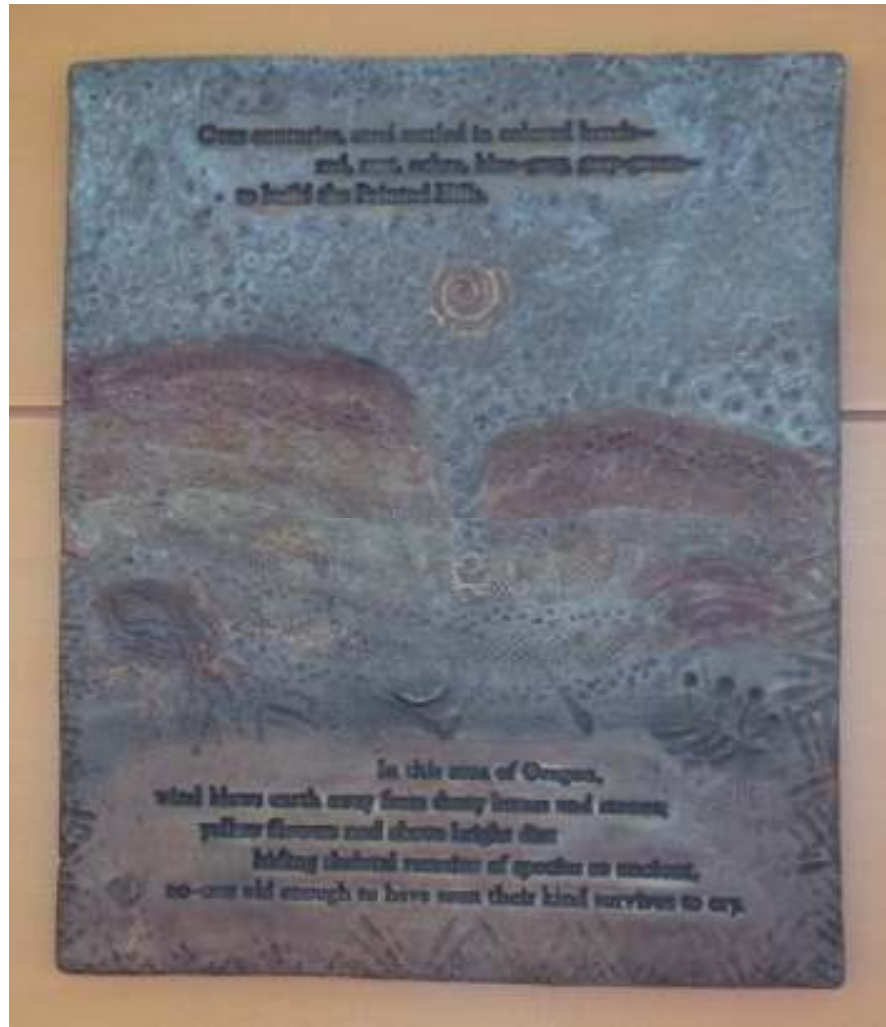


*Tsaglaglal,*  
the Bear Woman Chief who *Splyay* (Coyote) turned to stone,  
has stood watching for thousands of years  
above the ancient fishing site,  
ancestors' names echoing in her ears.



The old dreamers lived lightly on the land.  
With bells and seven drums they ushered in  
the dance to welcome the wild foods  
that Earth gave freely to keep the nations whole.

Even now, people remember their old songs  
and sing the words that keep the world alive.



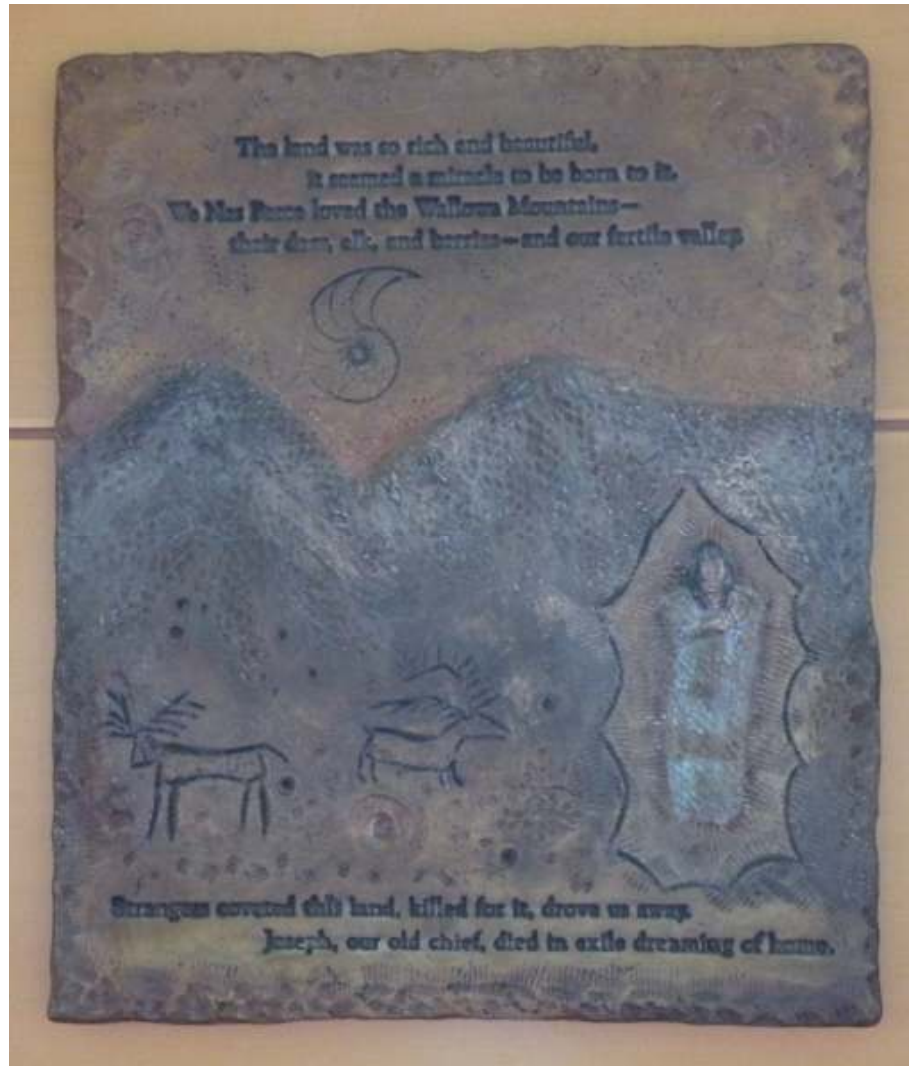
Over centuries, sand settled in colored bands –  
red, rust, ochre, blue-gray, gray-green –  
to build the Painted Hills.

In this area of Oregon,  
wind blows earth away from dusty bones and stones;  
yellow flowers nod above bright dirt  
hiding skeletal remains of species so ancient,  
no-one old enough to have seen their kind survives to cry.



Traveling down the Columbia towards the ocean in 1805,  
Sacagawea wondered if Lewis and Clark understood  
that the fish, the trees, the land itself was a sacred gift.

They traded and tallied, made endless notes,  
dreamt about what everything was worth.



The land is so rich and beautiful,  
it seemed a miracle to be born to it.  
We Nez Perce loved the Wallowa Mountains –  
the deer, elk, and berries – and our fertile valley.  
Strangers coveted this land, killed for it, drove us away.  
Joseph, our old chief, died in exile dreaming of home.



When foreigners arrived to settle and our whole world changed,  
some of us put on chaps.

Mothers and wives beaded vests and the tops of work gloves,  
and their sons and lovers became  
the most glamorous ranchers and cowpokes on the planet.



In the 1920's at Chemawa Indian School,  
young Lewis Pitt bristled under military discipline,  
refused to salute a sergeant.

Sent, as punishment, to salute every tree on the parade grounds,  
he gladly walked around greeting each one.

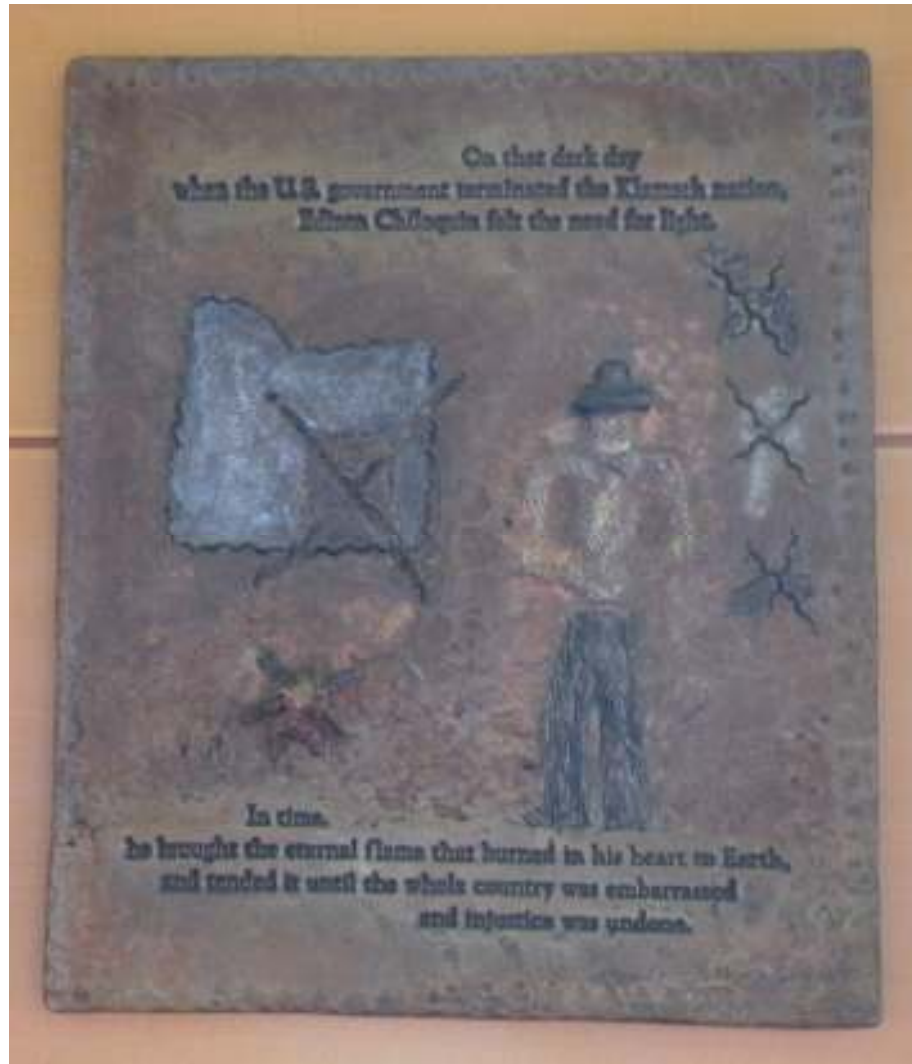
Better to honor elder beings rooted to a mothering Earth  
than to salute some oppressive fool.



In 1972, Paiutes in Burns, finally held their land in trust.  
Before 1868 they shared a good-sized country  
with cougar, antelope and quail, but settlers came.

Then, busier than local spiders  
spinning webs to hold hills in gossamer strands  
they worked ceaselessly, defined boundaries around  
a splinter of their home to hand on to coming generations.





On that dark day  
when the U.S. government terminated the Klamath nation,  
Edison Chiloquin felt the need for light.

In time,  
he brought the eternal flame that burned in his heart to Earth,  
and tended it until the whole country was embarrassed  
and injustice was undone.



The words of Sahaptin-speaking grandmothers sing in our ears:  
“*Puxa ikiukdiksh eniqnan alma daminava anxdushima.*”  
 (“What we learn from our elders can be carried on.”)



When Wasco grandparents hear the young ones say  
“*Nailasmna isapsikw'ana ana qw'apn patasapsikw'ana nch'inch'ima*”  
(Our mother taught us what she learned from her elders.),  
they remember their own mothers and smile.  
Some good things remain the same.



When we think about lessons from Paiute elders,  
“*Te numu natukana mesoo nahane*”  
 (“We can harvest our indigenous foods”)  
opens us to things that nourish both body and soul.



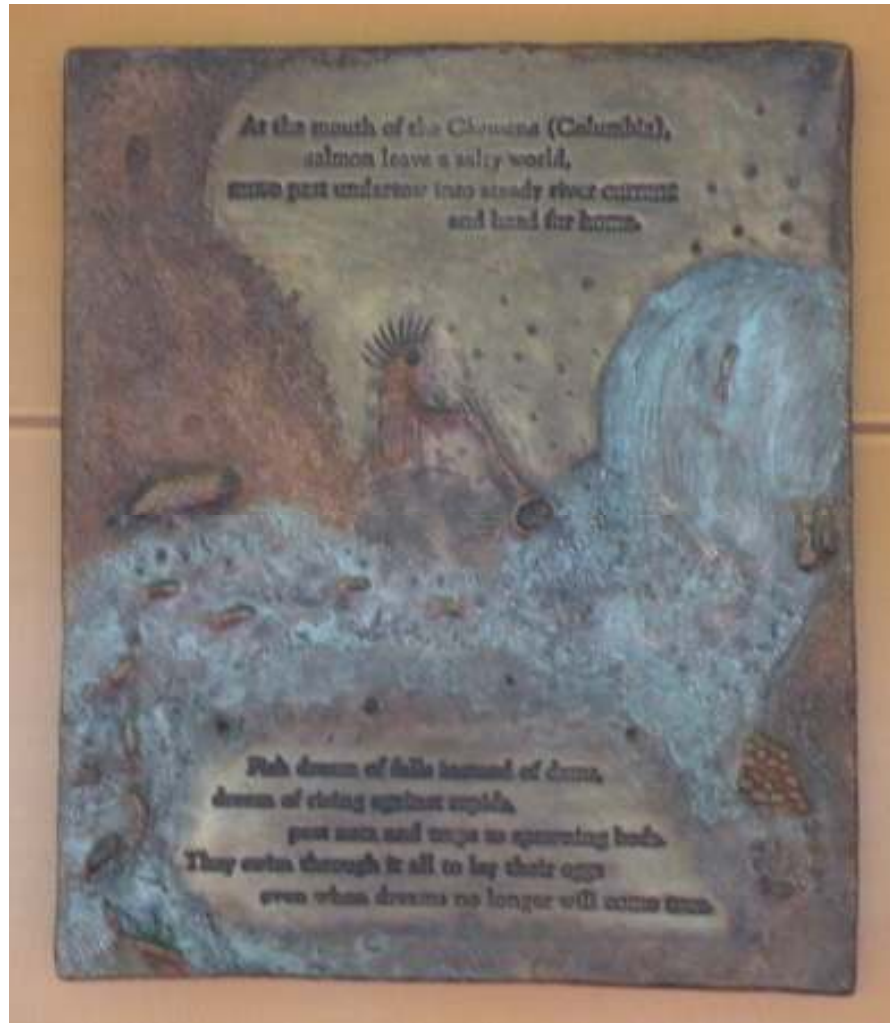
Among the things that root us surely in this place  
are the descendants of plant – *piaxi, lukush, wak'amu* –  
whose ancestors knew our grandmothers' digging sticks  
and came home in her beautiful twined bags  
to nurture our parents and make them strong.



Mount Neahkahnio rises above the edge of the ocean,  
its head intimate with clouds and mist.

On its side, an ancient stone god stares out to sea,  
Around him, tender plants hide in crevices  
from wind washed in from far away.

Foraging deer follow trails up the mountainside  
and bruise tender leaves with their tongues.



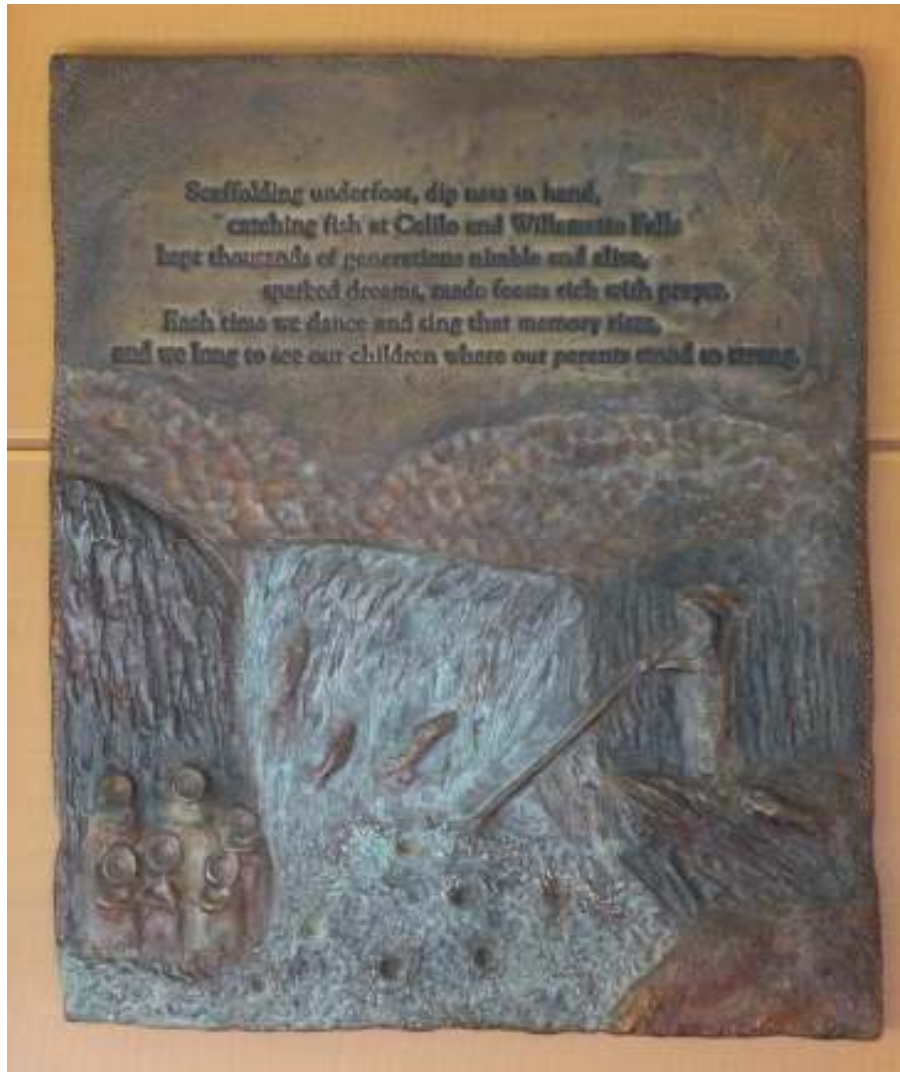
At the mouth of *Cheuwna* (Columbia),  
salmon leave a salty world,  
move past undertow into steady stream current  
and head for home.

Fish dream of falls instead of dams,  
dream of rising against rapids,  
past nets and traps to spawning beds.  
They swim through it all to lay their eggs  
even when dreams no longer will come true.

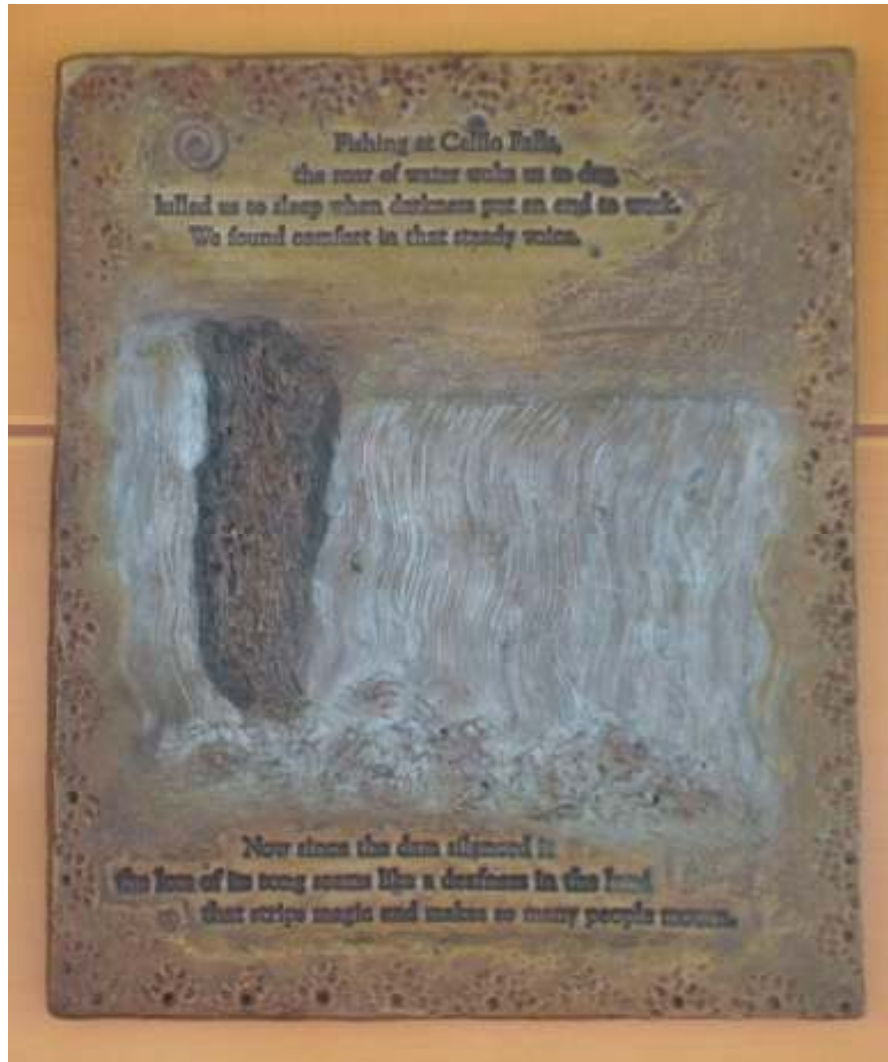


Bear dances in the water of a shallow stream  
batting startled sockeye onto the bank for lunch.  
Lying amid sword ferns, fish grow dizzy from too much air.





Scaffolding underfoot, dip nets in hand,  
catching fish at Celilo and Willamette Falls  
kept thousands of generations nimble and alive,  
sparked dreams, made feasts rich with prayer.  
Each time we dance and sing that memory rises,  
and we long to see our children where our parents stood so strong.



Fishing at Celilo Falls,  
the roar of water woke us to day,  
lulled us to sleep when darkness put an end to work.  
We found comfort in that steady voice.

Now since the dam silenced it  
the loss of its song seems like a deafness in the land  
that strips magic and makes so many people mourn.



Every season salmon come – a holy gift –  
year after year giving themselves,  
their bright-colored flesh a ceremony  
to teach the people their nations are blessed.

This generosity has taught generations  
that they share sacred relationships  
and must maintain the web of life.

# Lillian Pitt

## PACIFIC NORTHWEST NATIVE AMERICAN ARTIST



One of the indigenous people of the Columbia River Gorge, Lillian Pitt is known as a great innovator within her tradition. She has chosen to work in clay using Asian techniques like raku and anagama, to work in bronze or precious metals, to incorporate wood, copper, glass, shell, leather, feathers, and a wide variety of materials, and to mix media and technologies from around the globe.

With the turn of the millennium, Lillian's art took on an even larger dimension, as she and a team of Native American artists were commissioned by the city of Portland, OR, the Oregon Convention Center, Portland State University, and a variety of other municipalities and cultural institutions to create public art that reflects this heritage.

To learn more of Lillian, her art, and public arts projects, visit her website

<http://www.lillianpitt.com>