Memorial Resolution of the Faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison
On the Death of Professor Emeritus Truman Lowe (Wakajahųkga)

Truman Lowe (Wakajahųkga) was born at the Indian Mission near Black River Falls, Wisconsin. He grew up within the Ho Chunk traditions of his parents learning basketry, ribbon work, bead work, and a deep appreciation of the natural world. Truman Lowe is regarded as "the preeminent native sculptor of his generation." Truman’s Ho-Chunk ancestry and the forceful beauty of moving water is found in the multi-layered meaning of his artwork. The original prints, drawings and sculptures embody his fascination with streams and rivers, and the way water moves and reflects light.

Truman graduated with a B.S. in Art Education from UW-La Crosse in 1969. After teaching art at Valders High School, he received a Ford Fellowship to pursue his MFA in sculpture at UW-Madison, graduating in 1973. He received Distinguished Alumni Awards from both UW-La Crosse and UW-Madison.

Truman served his first year of teaching as a visiting lecturer at Emporia State University (1973-1974). He was then hired at UW-Madison in a joint position as assistant dean of students, Native American studies coordinator, and assistant professor of art. He received tenure at UW-Madison in 1989 as a full professor of art, primarily teaching sculpture, and served for three years as art department chair (1992-1995). In addition, he served as chair of the Chancellor’s Scholarship Committee for twenty years (1984-2004). He worked tirelessly to recruit and support underrepresented students interested in pursuing their education at UW-Madison. He was fundamental in the creation of the Education Graduate Research Scholars Fellowship (Ed-GRS) known across campus as the Advanced Opportunity Fellowship. During Truman’s 35 years with the University he taught thousands of students. Upon his retirement from UW-Madison, he was granted emeritus status (2010); Native American Art Studies Association (NAASA) awarded Truman the Lifetime Achievement Award (2019).

In addition to his career in academia and as a professional artist, Truman served as the curator of contemporary art for the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). Fifteen years in the making, the NMAI in Washington D.C. is the first national museum in the country dedicated exclusively to Native Americans. Truman served as part of the museum leadership (2000-2008) during the creation and opening of NMAI on the National Mall in 2004.

During his eight years at the NMAI, he curated numerous exhibits from an indigenous perspective including Native Modernism: The Art of George Morrison and Allan Houser (2004-2005), and Continuum: 12 Artists, at the NMAI’s space in New York City, Fritz Scholder: Indian/Not Indian (2008), and exhibited the work of James Luna and Edgar Heap of Birds at the Venice Biennale (2005 and 2007).

Truman received numerous prestigious awards throughout his career, including National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship (1994-1995), Eiteljorg Fellow for Native American Fine Art (1999), Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters Fellow (2005), Wisconsin Visual Art Lifetime Achievement Award (2007), and the Hilldale Award (2009). A catalog of his work titled, Woodland Reflections: The Art of Truman Lowe, is written by Jo Ortel (2003). Truman’s artwork has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions including the Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, Crow’s Shadow Institute of Art in Oregon, and the National Embassies of Bolivia and Cameroon. In 1997, he was commissioned to create a sculpture for the Jacqueline Kennedy

One of the foremost Native artists of his generation, he will also be remembered as an incredibly generous, eloquent mentor and teacher to many. As an artist and scholar, Truman helped others discover their own artistic voices especially students from under-represented communities. Through the UW-Madison Advanced Opportunity Fellowship, Truman worked to establish an educational partnership between first generation and minority students, the Graduate Research Scholars community, the School of Education, the Graduate School, and the State of Wisconsin.

UW-Madison honored Truman Lowe on campus with the naming of a newly constructed dormitory wing at Witte Hall (2019). The Chazen Museum of Art permanent collection holdings include Truman’s sculpture, and the museum director is in conversation with the Lowe family about additional works of art to honor Truman’s legacy.

Truman Lowe (Jan. 19, 1944 - March 30, 2019) is survived by his wife of 52 years, Nancy (Knabe) Lowe; daughter, Tonia Lowe (James Page); grandson, Anders Page; brother, Chloris Lowe; sister, Irene Keenan; and three generations of amazing nieces and nephews, all of whom affectionately called him “Uncle Tru.” Truman is preceded in death by his mother, Mabel Lowe; his father, Martin Lowe; brothers, Clifford Lowe and Raymond Lowe; sister, Arvina Thayer; and his son, Martin “Kunu” Lowe.

The Memorial Resolution Committee thanks Tonia Lowe and Jo Ortel, of Beloit College, for their contributions to Truman's obituary.

Memorial Resolution Committee:
Emily Arthur
John Hitchcock
Tom Jones
Jim Escalante