One of the joys of organizing an event like the Auburn Big Time-Pow Wow is bringing together talented artists, singers and dancers from the region to share their gifts with people who might not otherwise be exposed to Native American art and culture. Over the past year, it has been particularly rewarding to hear how participants have responded to – and have had their horizons opened by – the healing power of the artwork and activities of last year’s Big Time-Pow Wow.

For Native Americans, a Big Time or a Pow Wow represents an important cultural gathering that among other things, honors elders, youth and family. While these events offer a brilliant and beautiful array of traditional dancing, foods and music, they also bring a deeper meaning of a ceremonial nature that helps provide balance for the health of Native communities.

In addition to the ceremonial songs and dances shared at last year’s event – which marked the first of its kind after almost 10 years of absence – the Indian Arts and Crafts Market featured a number of fine artists who have translated the tradition of the artist as a carrier of spiritual and cultural information into contemporary forms and media. Honoring the role of artist as healer, these artists presented images of mystery, hope, reverence and transformation embedded within their tribal perspectives.

In the spirit of this year’s theme – Honoring Family and Children of Yesterday and Today – artwork from this event continues to inspire thoughts, conversations, and revitalize healing traditions in the homes of many pow-wow participants. Connections also were made between artists, cultural experts and community groups that have resulted in the inspiration of young artists of many cultures through cultural demonstrations and workshops.

Commissioned to provide the artwork for the poster commemorating last year’s event, Stan Padilla is a Native artist who is well known in the Auburn area. Exploring the symbols and shapes of local Maidu imagery and his own Yaki ancestry, Padilla’s work presents a journey in painting, jewelry and mixed media to a place that invokes universal truth and simplicity. His artist-in-residence exhibit at The Arts Building in Auburn explores this journey from different cultural perspectives, experienced as a fusion of meditation symbols from the four directions.

Working as an artist and mentor, Padilla teaches art at the United Auburn Indian School and worked with young visitors to the Maidu Interpretive Center on a mural project during the annual Leafing Out of Spring celebration this year. His abalone jewelry and mixed-media pieces can be found at Pacific Western Traders in Folsom, and around the necks of the beauti-
ful women who are fortunate to wear them.

Taking his art into the community, Jason Williams is a Huichol drum maker and graphic designer also featured at the 2008 Big Time-Pow Wow. Working with red cedar and various hides, the Whitewater Drum booth displayed his work in a variety of sounds and sizes. Making pow-wow size and ceremonial drums to order, Williams’ hand drums inspired demand for a series of drum-making workshops in the region.

Sharing traditional songs, stories and the art of making drums, Jason walks the pathway of artist as healer in his workshops. In one taught this year at the Todd’s Valley Miwok-Maidu Cultural Foundation, several generations of family members worked together to experience the joys and overcome the technical challenges of learning this traditional craft. Testing their instruments together in the woods, workshop participants also were able to experience the connection that drumming makes to the elements and the presence of nature through the vibrations of a well-made drum.

Dedicated to the revitalization of indigenous art and knowledge in the region, Williams has contributed to the development of youth education programs as board chairman of the Native Alliance of the Sierra Nevada Foothills. Using cultural knowledge as a tool for healing in his work, he also serves as a coach/mentor at the Rites of Passage program in Markleeville, facilitating positive connections and growth for youth of many traditions.

The artwork for the Auburn Big Time-Pow Wow 2009 poster design features another artist from the Indian Market. Ikoshy Montoya is an internationally known Lipan Apache artist whose brightly colored airbrush paintings stayed in the memory of many event participants. Montoya’s work reminds us of the role of art in the resiliency of culture, often portraying intimate moments of connection to the awe and power of cosmic forces through ceremony.

When selecting the poster art for this year’s event, members of the planning committee remembered one of Montoya’s pencil drawings – entitled “Familiar Balance” – which captured the theme of Honoring Family and Children of Yesterday and Today. Depicting an image of a California Native family gathered around an oak tree, the drawing shows a child on a cradleboard as if he or she were growing within the trunk of the tree.

This image expresses the hope of the planning committee to see our children growing safely within the roots of their culture, being guided by parents who are healthy and strong in tradition. By providing a venue for Native people to come together to share culture and traditions, we hope to inspire a new generation of artists, dancers, singers and drummers who will nurture the roots of the tree we all continue to draw life from.

By inviting these and other talented artists back to the Gold Country Fairgrounds Oct. 17 for this year’s Auburn Big Time-Pow Wow, we hope to continue the tradition of honoring the healing power of art.

About the Author:
Anno Nakai (Saami) is the director of the Sierra Native Alliance and co-chairs the Auburn Big Time-Pow Wow. An indigenous artist, Anno sings, writes, tells stories and works on video projects to support Native arts and cultural organizations. Anno has a Master of Arts in Arts and Consciousness from John F. Kennedy University, and uses her certification in art therapy to facilitate community healing.