

Hopi maiden takes her place outside Taawaki Inn

BY OLIVIA MAILLET

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CLARKDALE — A nearly 4-foot-tall sculpture of a Hopi maiden was recently unveiled at the entrance of the Taawaki Inn.

The Hopi artist behind the gentle figure is Kim Seyesnem Obrzut, who has been casting bronze for over 40 years. Seyesnem Obrzut, who is trained in the traditional Hopi “scrape and smooth” method, uses a hard tool to manipulate and form hand-coiled clay.

“My work is very contemporary, but my sculptures are steeped in spiritual and symbolic content,” the sculptor noted in an artist’s statement in which she also connected her work to that of her grandfather, whom she’d watch carve dolls.

She said that not only do her sculptures reflect the history of the Hopi people, “they transcend the traditions of an ancient people into an ancient art form of bronze. I am trying to capture a moment in time of my people and have it remembered for many generations to come.”

The artist’s daughter, Krystal Obrzut, said her mother was one of



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From left to right, Linda Durbano, Krystal Obrzut and Chelsey Hamilton get a first glimpse of the Hopi maiden statue created by Kim Seyesnem Obrzut.

the first Hopi women to work in bronze.

As Obrzut explained, Hopi society is matrilineal, meaning clans are inherited through a mother’s bloodline. Typically, households are managed and owned by women, she said. Land, property and household ceremonial knowledge are passed from mother to daughter, while men assume leadership roles in Hopi ceremonies, politics and religious life.

“Women own the land,” Obrzut said. “Men are the Kachina carvers. To this day, [only] men are ... allowed to carve Kachinas. So my mother is

not a carver. [The Hopi maiden sculpture] is what she came up with that’s allowed by the tribe.”

None of Seyesnem Obrzut’s willowing statues has a face. This is because each figure represents “one kin,” her daughter said.

Seyesnem Obrzut’s sculptures have exhibited across the Southwest. Notably, a 6-foot-tall Hopi maiden sculpture is on display at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture in Santa Fe, N.M., Obrzut said.

Here, in Clarkdale, the statue is placed with intention, to welcome visitors.

“The idea is that



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Krystal Obrzut stands with her mother’s Hopi maiden statue, which was installed by the entrance of the Taawaki Inn.



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Verde Canyon Railroad employees help a moving service position the Hopi maiden statue outside the Taawaki Inn.

when you drive in, this statue will be at eye level with your wind-

shield to greet you,” said Linda Durbano, who owns the Taawaki

Inn and Verde Canyon Railroad with her husband, Dave.