

FIRE, FURY, & RESILIENCE

Totem Witnesses and Turtle Wisdom



BETTY LADUKE

FIRE, FURY, & RESILIENCE

Totem Witnesses and Turtle Wisdom



Grants Pass Museum of Art

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All works completed by Betty LaDuke

Published in conjunction with the exhibition

Fire, Fury, & Resilience

March 29 through May 20, 2022

Organized by Grants Pass Museum of Art

Grants Pass, Oregon

Exhibition and catalog made possible by the generosity
of:

Redwood Nursery

The Josephine County Cultural Coalition

The Ford Family Foundation

Printed by Minuteman Press

722 Rossanley Dr, Medford, OR 97501

541-776-7966 www.minutemanpress.com

Photography by Robert Jaffe

<https://robjaffe.com/>

Cover concept and catalog design by J. Jones

When I became the director of the Grants Pass Museum of Art, I used to receive notes from Betty about her newest art and exhibit ideas. I was familiar with her art because of the work she has in the Medford Airport. In 2016, the museum had a solo exhibit of Betty's work called "Oregon Harvest." The exhibit depicted Oregon's agricultural workers, much like the art in the airport. That is when I met Betty for real.

Since then we have become friends and the more I communicate with her, the more I am in awe of her creativity, energy, thoughtfulness, and persistence. Her frequent mail to the museum is always encouraging. Her signature ends with a bird. She tells me that birds represent freedom to her.

In 2019, the museum hosted a solo exhibit called "Social Justice." This exhibit was a combination of the past, the present, and the future. It was also a definite statement of Betty's passion for the earth in general and animals, plants, water, and humans specifically. Throughout her life she has traveled and sketched what she sees. There is a mountain of sketch books in her studio. Some of the sketches are becoming coloring books.

The books are a gentle way to introduce people of all ages to the issues of life.

When Betty began promoting "Fire, Fury, & Resilience," we knew the exhibit would be timely and thought provoking. To go along with the exhibition, we are produced this catalog to give visitors as long as supplies last. Grants from the Josephine County Cultural Coalition and the Ford Family Foundation helped this venture. We look forward to what we believe will be a very popular exhibit.

*Hyla Lipson
Executive Director
Grants Pass Museum of Art*

TO BEAR WITNESS

Fire, Fury, and Resilience presents an opportunity to experience Betty LaDuke's most recent work and to travel with her through the social concerns and political issues that have dominated the news cycles and engaged her as an artist-activist over the past decade. I have been an observer of and advocate for her work for close to sixty years; for me this exhibition represents a moment in which both the formal innovation in her work and the power of her worldview as an artist have come full circle. In these shaped and carved totemic paintings, all on a common plywood ground, I recognize a bringing together of key aspects of the artist's radically experimental intaglio printmaking of the 1960s with stylistic elements of her later paintings that evolved out of imagery in her travel sketchbooks. Together these give aesthetic form to the artist's deep concern for the present state of humanity.

LaDuke first gained recognition as a printmaker, attacking the sanctity of the rectangular metal etching plate and woodcut panel by cutting away the matrix to outline or silhouette her subjects, freeing the human figures or animal forms for printing onto the white paper ground. Without the backdrop of an interior or landscape to suggest a narrative, the vigorously rendered figures thus became iconic representations. By radically altering the traditional format of the print and the relationship of image to rectangular field, the artist made the expressive power of her subjects' silhouettes and the immediacy of her drawing an aesthetic signature of her work going forward. LaDuke clearly relished the physicality of the directly carved woodcuts and the deeply etched intaglios, and began to push her successful experimentation with prints into three-dimensional, modular totems. She also sought to develop a more expressive painting vocabulary, which resulted in dynamic works with richly textured and collaged surfaces and powerfully rendered figuration that took on the sociopolitical issues of the day (equal rights, the Vietnam War, free love). By reducing the background imagery of her prints to a white field, and then paring down the background of her paintings to either a few objects suggestive of place or an emotionally charged field of a single color, LaDuke focused on refining her imagery, its emotional verity, symbolism, and universality. These rule-breaking works of the 1960s and early 1970s had a profound impact on me as a young artist and curator, and established the foundation of my lifelong admiration for the artist and her uncompromising work.

While LaDuke is quick to talk about the experiences, events, and political circumstances that have inspired specific works, she rarely discusses formal innovations in her work or the stylistic evolution of her imagery. Nevertheless, it is that development of her working practice over the years-the aesthetic conventions and choices she has made-that, for me, gives vibrant form to the true heart of her work and its power to

express her deeply moving optimism. The iconography and representational tropes presented in these new works are, self-evidently, direct descendants of the paintings that LaDuke developed from her sketchbook journeys. Between 1972 and 2009, she undertook a series of solitary expeditions, leaving her home in Ashland, Oregon, to travel to far-flung places-Mexico, India, Africa, Central America, the South Pacific, and East Asia-in search of authentic experiences and connections with people of all kinds. These direct cross-cultural encounters, which she documented through drawings in her sketchbooks, provided not only the inspiration and purpose behind much of her work, but also a wealth of imagery that produced a core of motifs-birds, serpents, turtles, an open hand, a cluster of disembodied faces, the patterns of Indigenous weavings and molasses-which became ever more abstract and universal in form and meaning over time. A bird, for instance, stripped of descriptive details and anatomy and reduced to silhouette and color, can in one moment serve as the nose and brow of a figure's face and also symbolize the spirit of that figure; or fly above a group of partial figures as the embodiment of concepts such as "Hope" or "Dream" or "Peace." Just as LaDuke's figures rapidly lost their individual characteristics, racial identity, or nationality through simplification and abstraction, the imagery and individual motifs in her paintings became symbols and signifiers of her belief in the shared humanity of all people, the power and grace of women, and the importance of families in community.

The current totem works communicate resonant emotional experiences through a powerful use of color; a vigorous painted line outlining strong patterns; and the directional texture of router-carved, paint-filled surfaces that-rather than traditional perspective-create and organize shallow abstract spaces that are filled with fragmentary figures and mask-like faces embodying the sociopolitical intention of the totem. An artist of great skill and immense empathy, LaDuke has used the indefatigable power of her optimism to do battle with inhumanity-its violence and anger, its horror and injustice-through her art. We celebrate Betty LaDuke's totems as resilient symbols of human joy and sorrow, affirmations of humility and strength; as they give form to the dignity, struggles, and aspirations of the people.

*Bruce Guenther
Fine Arts Consultant
Independent Curator*

FIRE, FURY, & RESILIENCE

Totem Witnesses and Turtle Wisdom



TOTEM WITNESSES

Totems, or tall wood panels, are inspired by Native American totem poles. They evolved as my witnesses and storytellers... so that we would not forget... and find ways to move forward.

Totem forms begin with sketchbook drawings. I release emotions as shaped-stories that can be transferred onto plywood surfaces approximately 62" tall by 24" wide. Skill saw and routers define forms and give depth before paint is applied to the thirsty wood. Totems have evolved in the themes that follow.

Alone in my Oregon studio the world rushes in and I have a compelling need to give form to the local and global events reshaping our lives.

They are Climate Change, the Pandemic, Border Crossings, and Social Justice.

How have these events affected us, our families, and communities? How can we each express our pain, resilience, and hope? Totem Witnesses and Turtle Wisdom became my response.



FIRE, FURY, AND RESILIENCE

CLIMATE CHANGE IS HERE

Climate Change is presented in three panels: Fire, Fury, and Resilience. They are an homage to my Southern Oregon community that experienced the devastating effects of a fire fueled by drought and wild winds. Many families were given a two-word warning, “Go Now.” The results of the September 8, 2020 fire, including the loss of 2,500 homes, is ongoing.

“I don’t want your hope... I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.”

Greta Thunberg 1/24/2019

“No one in the Rogue Valley will forget September 8, 2020, when the Almeda Fire roared north from the edge of Ashland through Talent and Phoenix to the edge of Medford. Thousands of homes were destroyed in a matter of hours, and only the courageous efforts of our firefighters stopped the march of the wind-driven flames and prevented catastrophic loss of life.”

*November /December 2021, Jefferson Journal,
article by Pepper Trail and Nate Trimble*



Fire



Fury

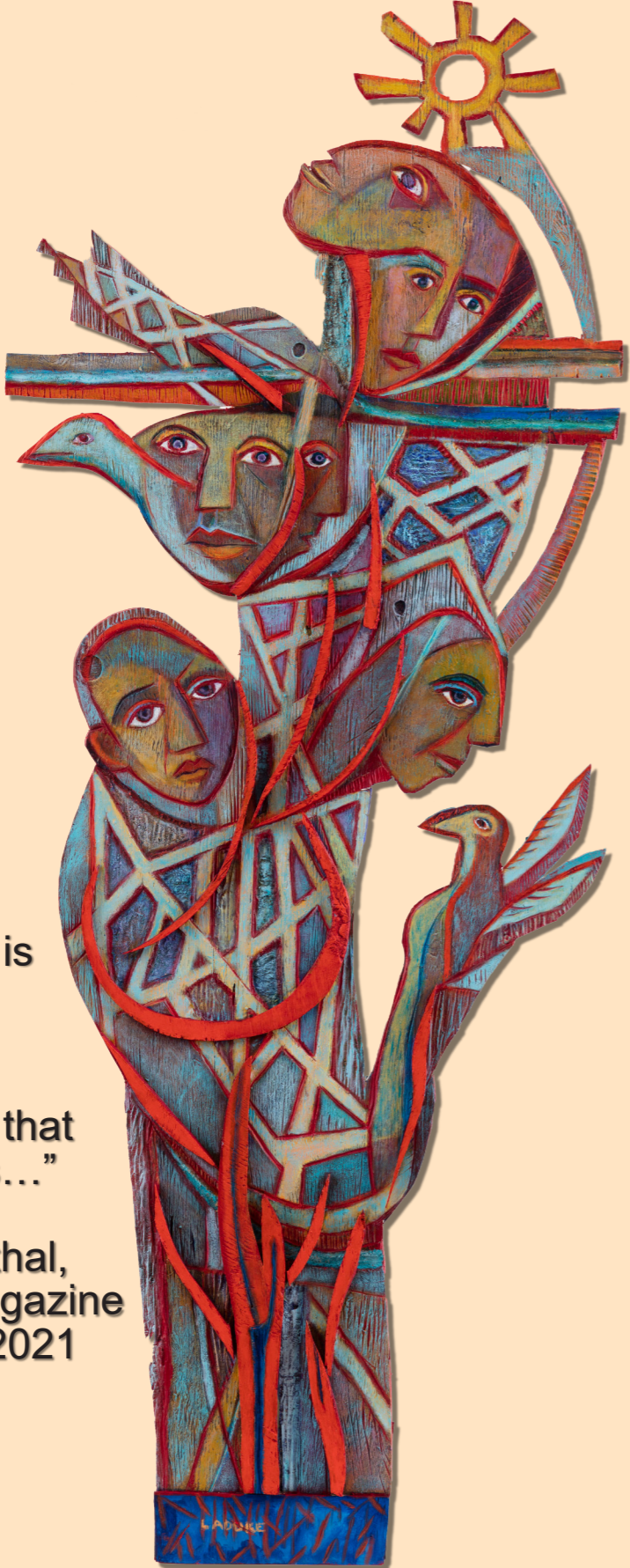


Resilience

THE PANDEMIC

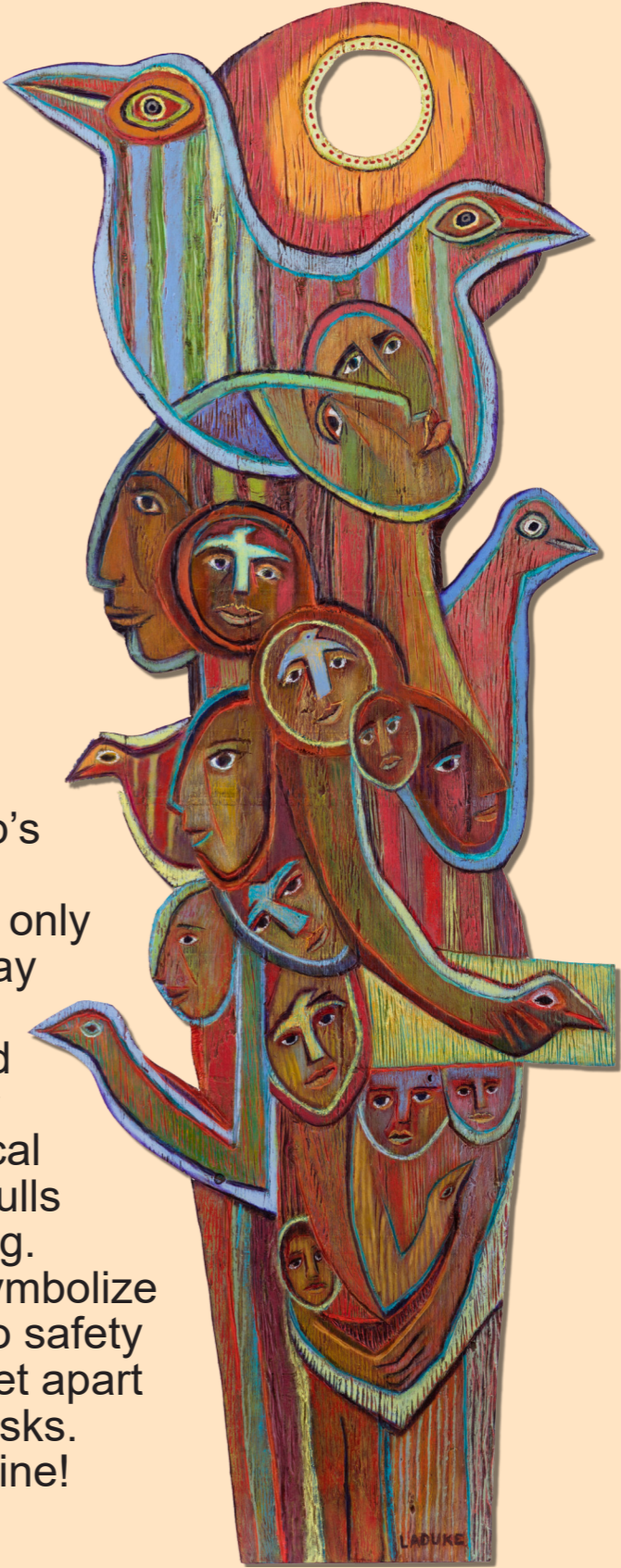
“The global response to climate change is now the underlying framework for everything else that society debates...”

Edward Felsenthal,
Editor TIME Magazine
November 15, 2021



Cyclones from Alabama to Mozambique

This series began with President Trump’s early 2020 assurance, “It is only an Easter Sunday virus.” This panel is followed by three smaller panels - a satirical response, Seagulls Social Distancing. Seagulls also symbolize our resistance to safety concerns, six feet apart and wearing masks. Finally, the vaccine!



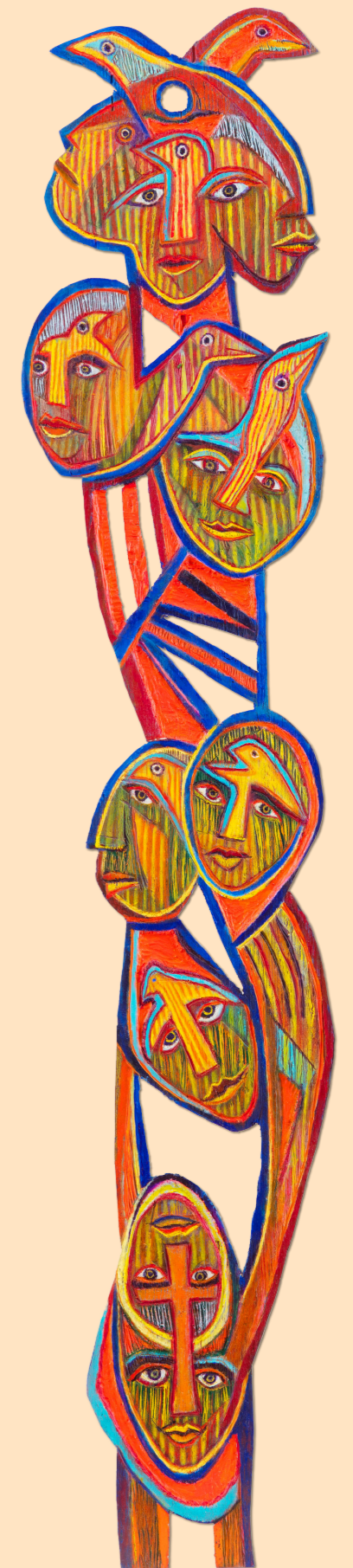
Easter Sunday Flu



Pandemic, Agony, and Resilience



The Vaccine



What to Believe

SEAGULLS SOCIAL DISTANCING

I sketched seagulls along the Oregon coast as they soared and dove against a setting sun. I never imagined these sketches would become a symbolic catalyst for my current art work about our new reality, the Corona virus pandemic and the necessity for social distancing: six feet apart and wearing a mask.



In early March 2020, in my Ashland studio, I began with paintbrush and paint to roughly capture seagull's energy on the rough surface of three plywood panels. They completely filled each 2' by 3' panel as their wings spanned across the circular curves of the sun.

We Are Thinking About It

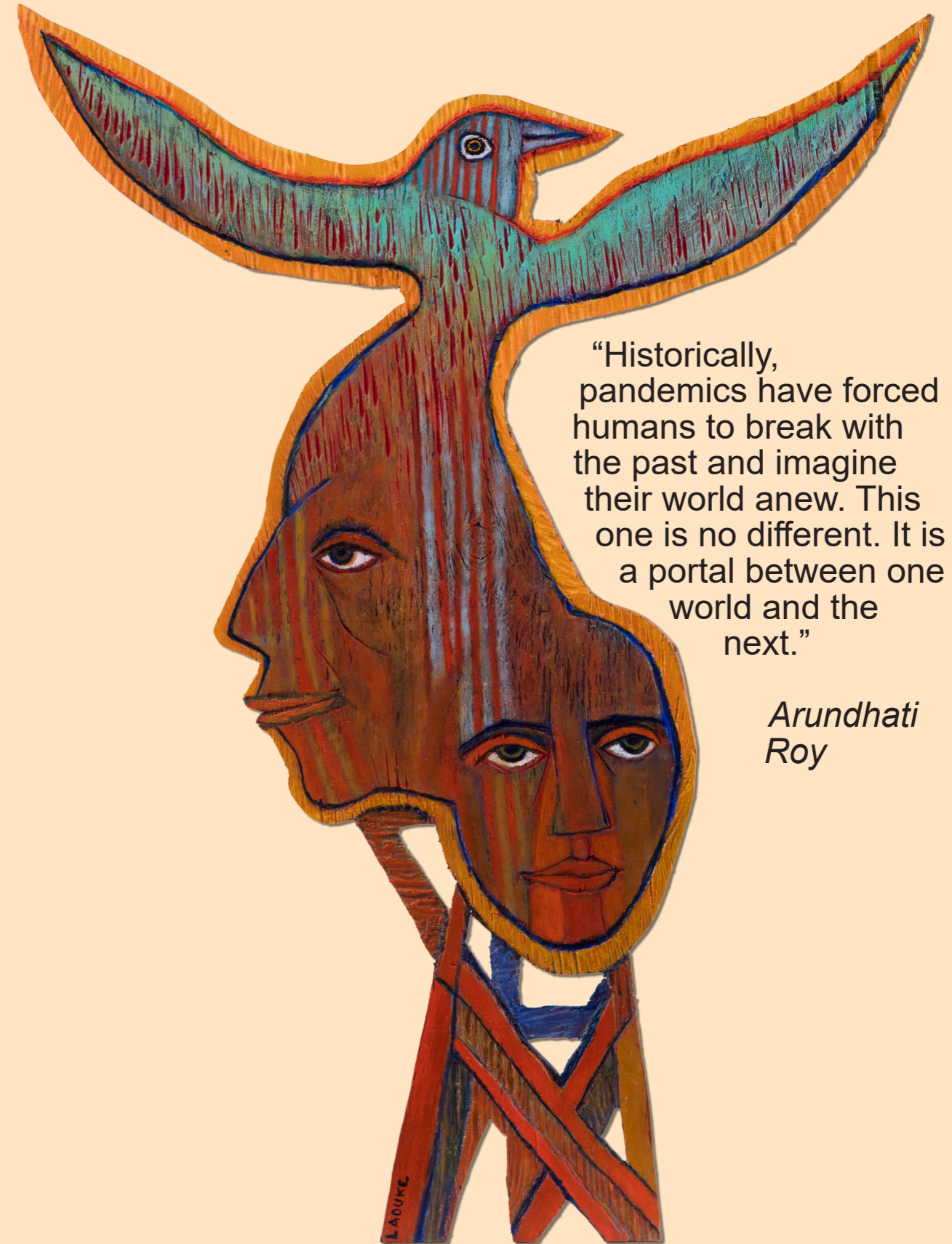


Feeding seagulls with layers of paint became my passion. That was my daily work process. Developing these diverse seagull forms also helped me cope with the anxieties and uncertainty we all share, nationally, and globally.

Social Distancing Solitude



We Really Don't Care



“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal between one world and the next.”

Arundhati Roy

This Too Shall Pass

WORK PROCESS



I began this series with many sketchbook responses to each event. A select drawing is transferred onto a rough grained wood panel with brush and paint. As I outline the form, I allow for theme exploration and changes. The Totem's or the Turtle's exterior form is shaped with a skill saw. Chisels define and give depth to the storytelling forms within. It is a slow process. Finally, many colors of acrylic paint fill the wood crevices and surface to create symbolic panel stories.

Inspiration for each Totem Witness panel begins with sketchbook drawings that explore forms and feelings, concerning the collective events reshaping our lives.



The Turtle Wisdom series evolves from the need to dream, hope, and maintain relationships with family and friends in a healthy environment.



BORDER CROSSINGS

Border Crossings starts with The Border Children (I Really Do Care), Caravans Between Dreams and Reality, and Hungry for Hope.

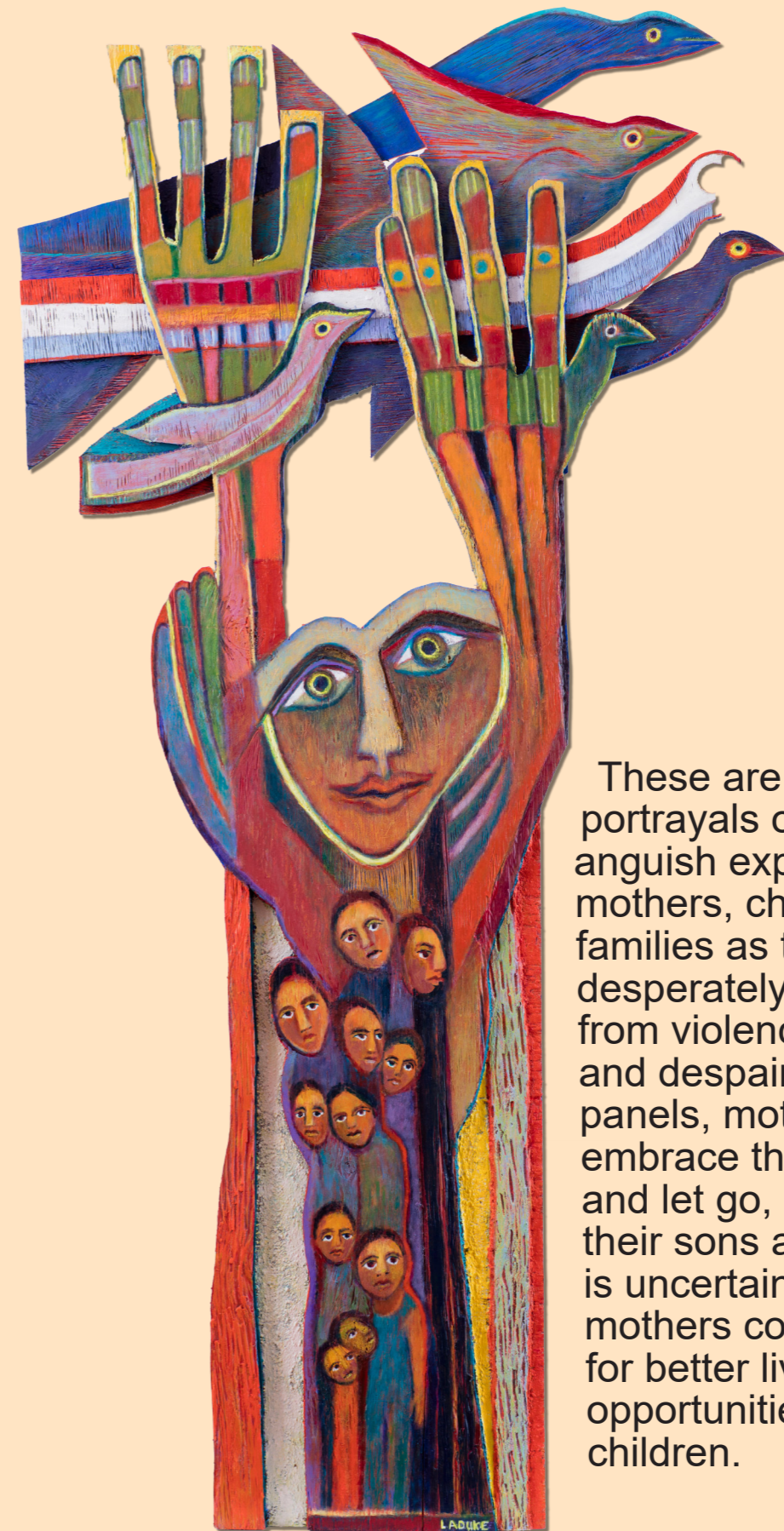
My 2019 journey to the Nogales, Arizona and Mexico border inspired Desert Cross. This panel is an homage to the thousands of migrants who did not survive their desperate journeys. Build Bridges, Not Walls concludes this series.

"I really don't care, do U?" This slogan appeared on Melania Trump's jacket worn when she visited the children separated from their parents and held in detention centers at the US - Mexico Border.

Migrants Between Hope and Desperation

"Their journey began in war poverty and oppression. They are fleeing by the hundreds of thousands from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, from Somalia, Iran, Pakistan and Eritrea in ceaseless flow of humanity driven by fear, insecurity and lack of opportunity, their desperation matched only by their courage and by their hope."

Time Magazine October 19, 2015

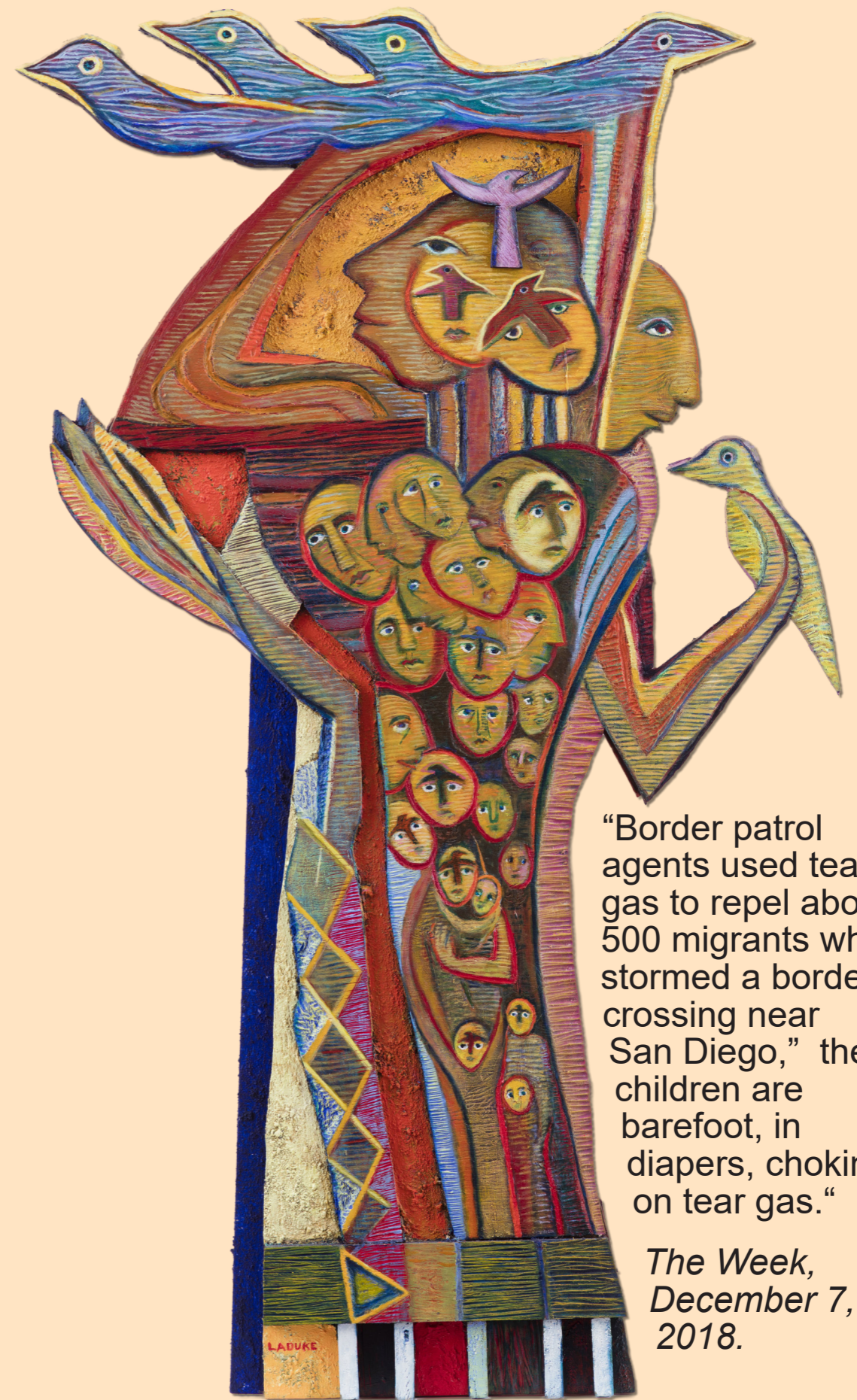


These are symbolic portrayals of emotional anguish experienced by mothers, children, and families as they desperately seek refuge from violence, hunger, and despair. In the panels, mothers both embrace their children and let go, as the future of their sons and daughters is uncertain. But, the mothers continue to hope for better lives and opportunities for their children.

Border Children: No More Cages



Migrants Between Hope and Desperation



“Border patrol agents used tear gas to repel about 500 migrants who stormed a border crossing near San Diego,” the children are barefoot, in diapers, choking on tear gas.”

*The Week,
December 7,
2018.*

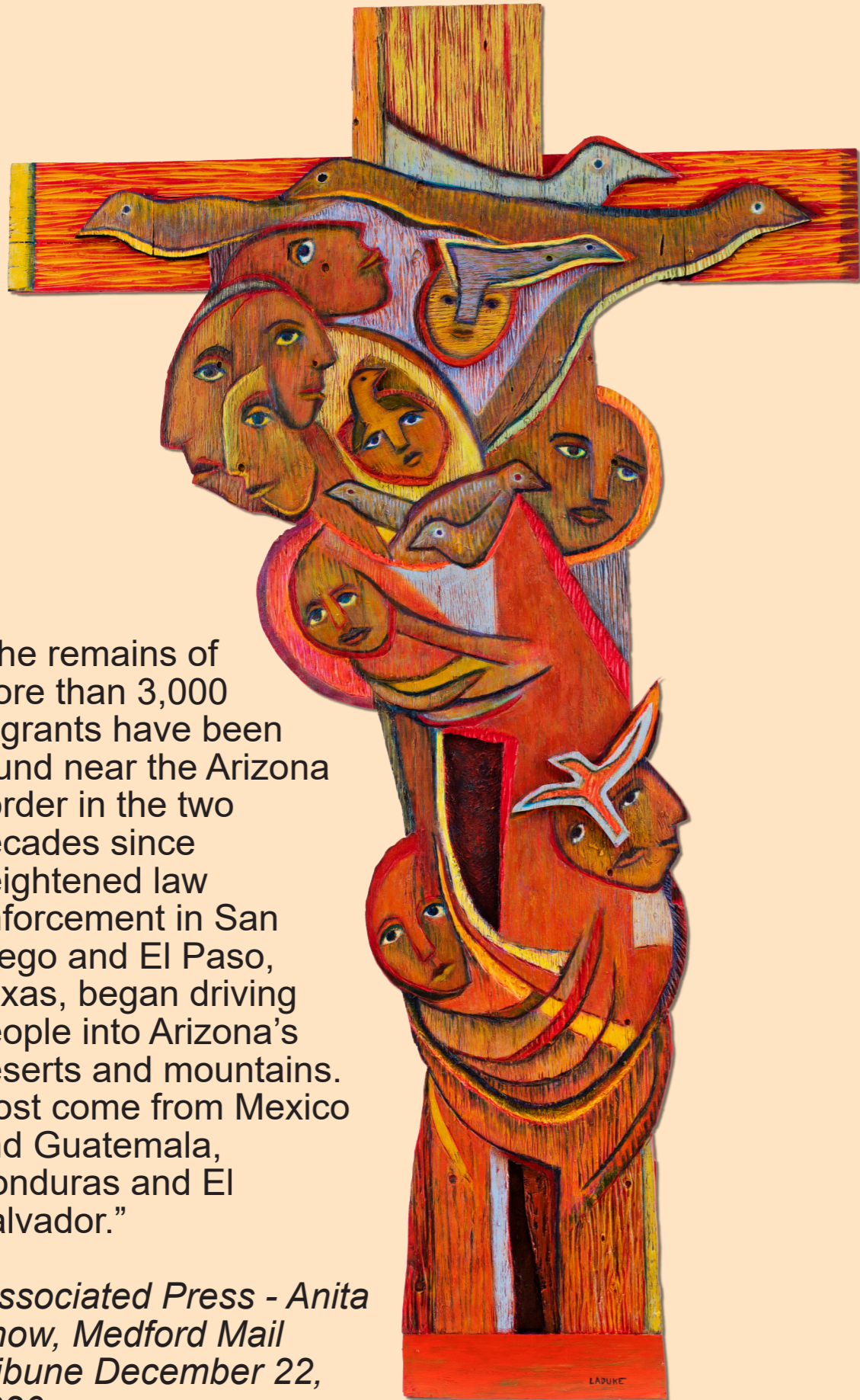
Caravans: Between Dream and Reality



Hungry for Hope



Stubborn Hope



“The remains of more than 3,000 migrants have been found near the Arizona border in the two decades since heightened law enforcement in San Diego and El Paso, Texas, began driving people into Arizona’s deserts and mountains. Most come from Mexico and Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.”

Associated Press - Anita Snow, Medford Mail Tribune December 22, 2020

Desert Cross



Build Bridges Not Walls

SOCIAL JUSTICE

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE MEANS REMEMBERING THE PAST

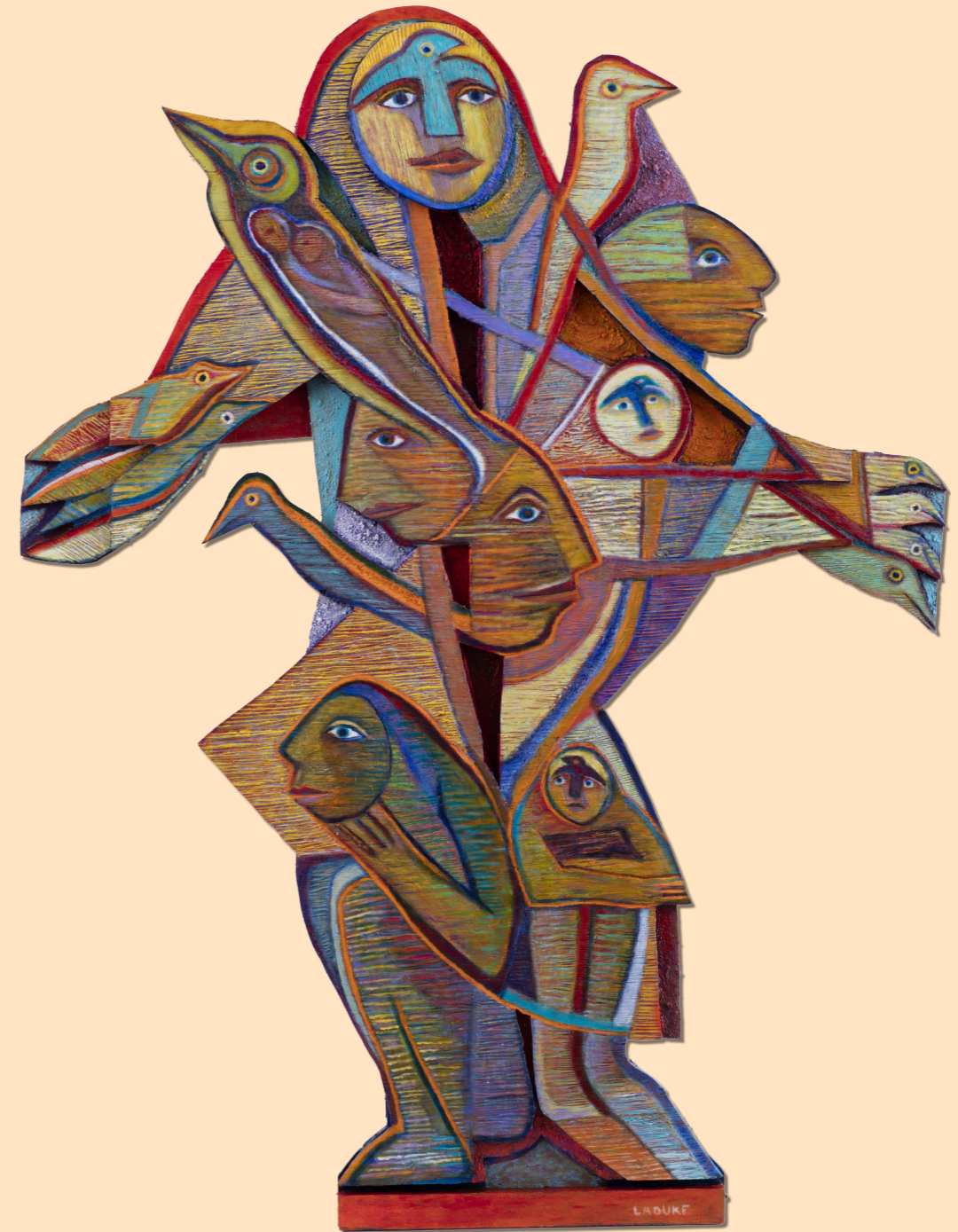
Cultural inspiration for panel forms is based on:

- *Living, studying, and creating art in Mexico (art scholarships 1953 - 1956), and experiencing pre-Columbian art sites especially monumental stone sculptures

- *Northwest Native American art especially totem poles and masks

- *Research journeys to Africa where I experienced many diverse functional and spiritual inspiring art forms

I am grateful for these opportunities and experiences of cultural diversity. I also consider my current panels a combination of media inspired by decades of work as a painter painting large canvases on cultural themes and as a printmaker. I created many woodblock prints, as well as etchings, by cutting and shaping zinc plates. Shaped forms have always been my preference, and they are now combining my experiences of both a painter and printmaker.

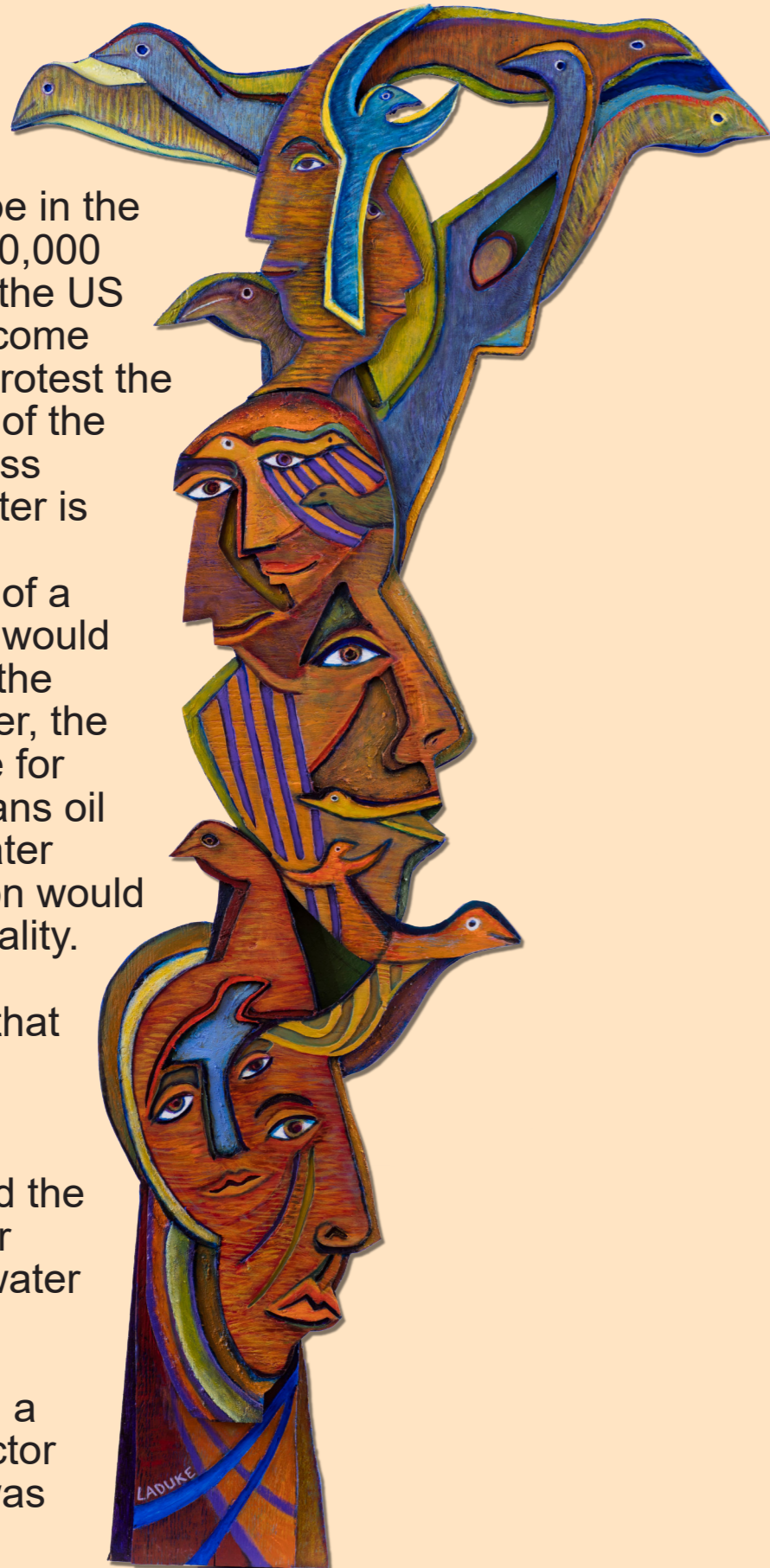


“How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
How many seas must a white dove sail.
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, and how many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they’re forever banned?”

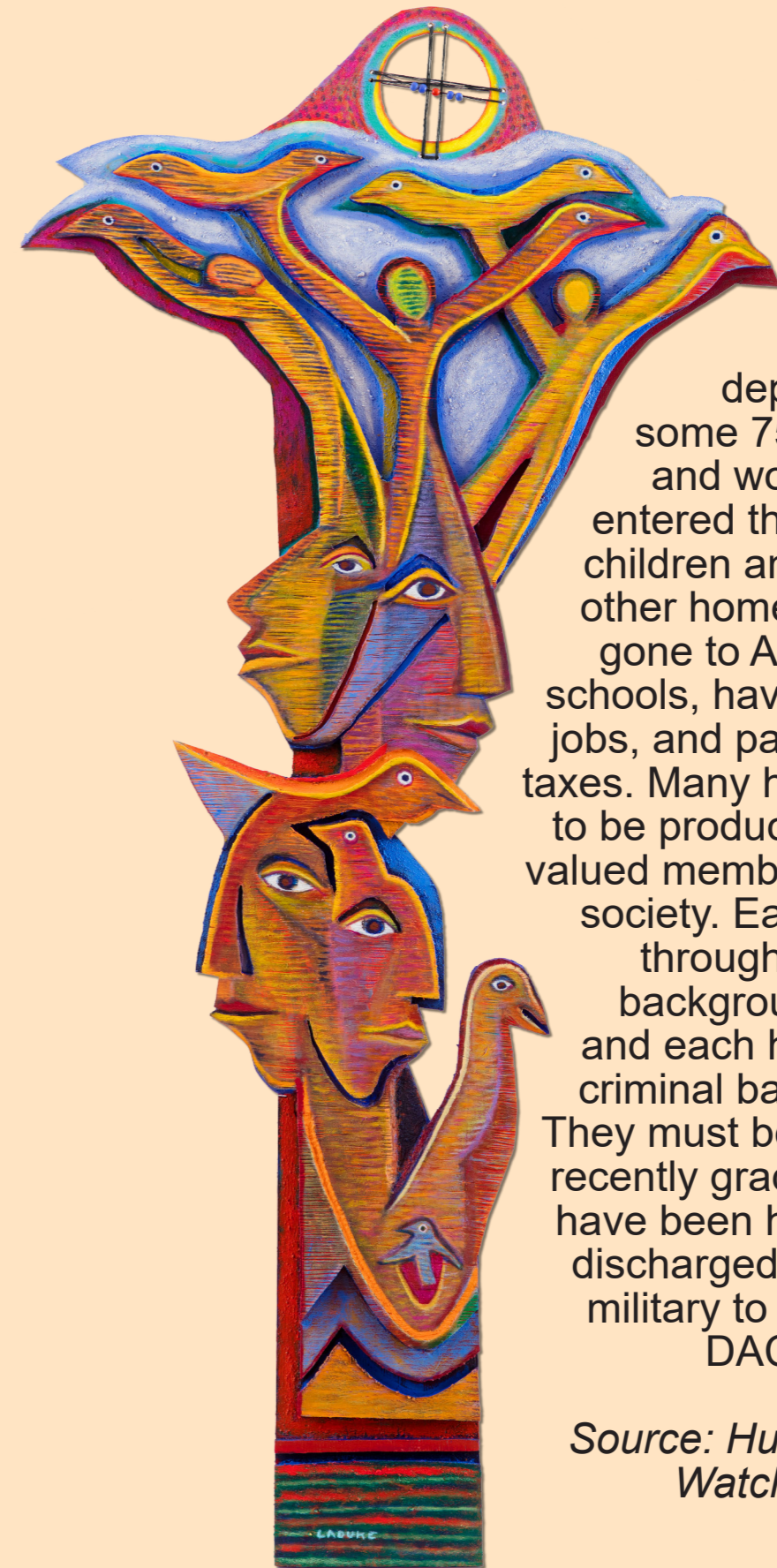
Bob Dylan “Blowin’ in the Wind” 1963

Blowin’ in the Wind (When Will We Ever Learn?)

It sparks hope in the world when 10,000 people from the US and abroad come together to protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Water is Life. The construction of a pipeline that would cross under the Missouri River, the water source for millions, means oil spills and water contamination would become a reality. In spite of a police force that included firehoses, chemical spraying, and the use of rubber bullets, the water protectors remained resilient, and a Water Protector movement was born.



Standing Rock Water Protectors

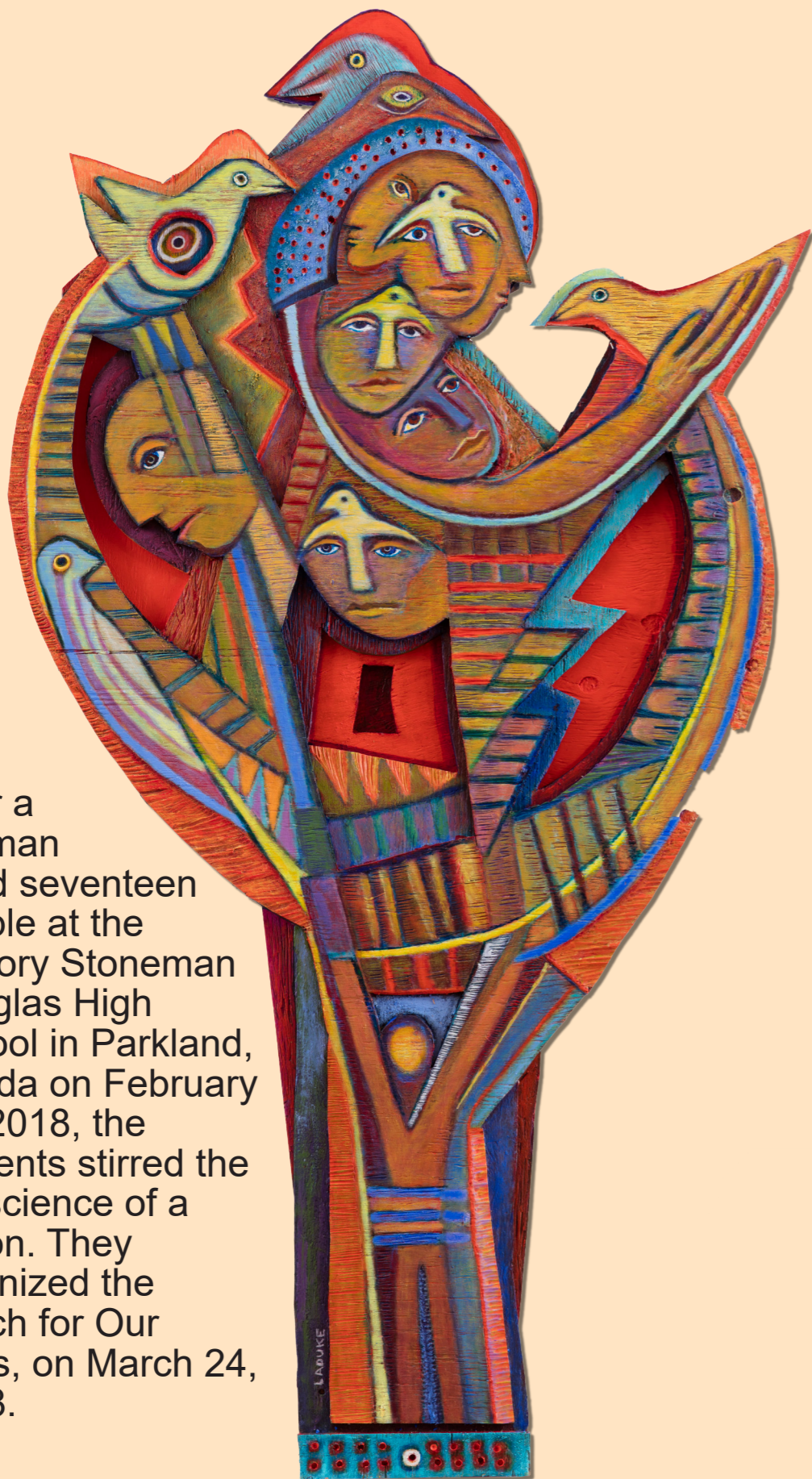


DACA has offered protection against deportation to some 750,000 men and women who entered this nation as children and know no other home. They've gone to American schools, have American jobs, and pay American taxes. Many have proven to be productive and valued members of this society. Each goes through an FBI background check and each has a clean criminal background. They must be in school, recently graduated, or have been honorably discharged from the military to apply for DACA.

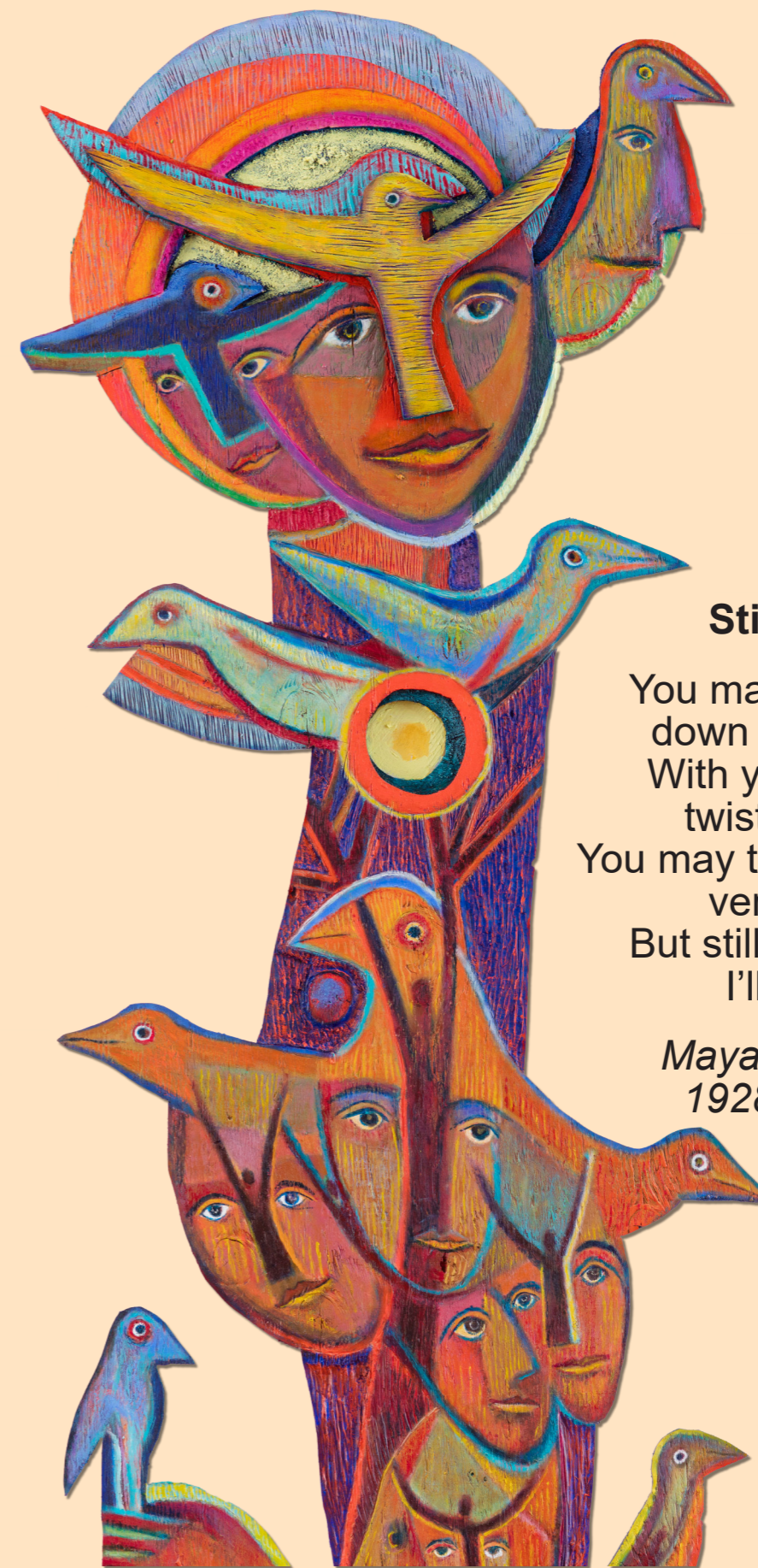
Source: Human Rights Watch 2017

DACA Dreamers

After a gunman killed seventeen people at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida on February 14, 2018, the students stirred the conscience of a nation. They organized the March for Our Lives, on March 24, 2018.



Am I Next? (School Shootings) "Marching For Our Lives"



Still I Rise

You may write me
down in history
With your bitter,
twisted lies,
You may trod me in the
very dirt.
But still, like dust,
I'll rise.

*Maya Angelou
1928 - 2014*

Still I Rise

RACIAL INJUSTICE

Protests continue this year, without a centralized team of leadership. The largest protest movement in US history has been unfolding nationwide. The movement was sparked by the May 25, 2020 death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police.



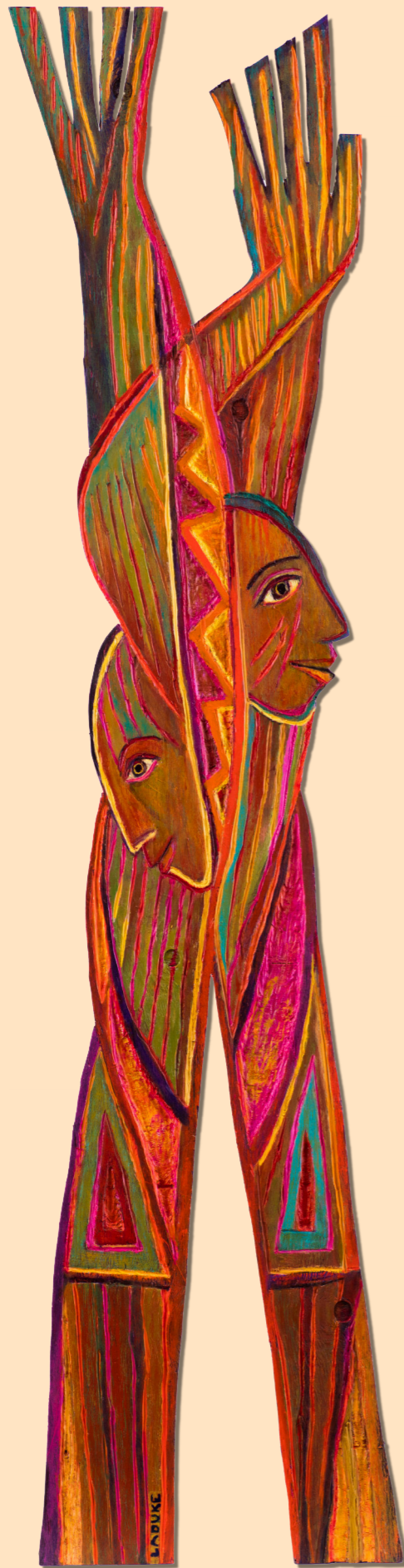
No Justice No Peace #1



“By some calculations, more than 15 million Americans have taken part, decrying racial injustice, and reinforcing the message of Black Lives Matter.”

Associated Press, August 3, 2020 and Medford Mail Tribune September 3, 2020

No Justice No Peace #2



Silence Is Not An Option



Remembering

TURTLE WISDOM

LIVING IN A WAY THAT WOULD MAKE YOUR ANCESTORS PROUD

Turtles symbolically evolved as a personal necessity to affirm life's continuity. They are Turtle Dreams, Turtle Love, Turtle Resilience, and Turtle Hope.

Turtles remind us of the choices we can make to protect life and to honor Mother Earth such as Turtle Heirloom Seed-Keeper and Turtle Water Protector.

Turtle Dreams
Turtle Resilience
Turtle Expectations

“Power is not brute force and money; power is your spirit. Power is in your soul. It is what your ancestors, your old people gave you. Power is in the earth; it is in your relationship to the earth.”

Winona LaDuke

Turtle Hope
Turtle Heirloom Seed Keeper
Turtle Water Protector

“We are in a pivotal time. The next decade will determine the future of our planet and our global family. If we choose well, we may be able to rebuild before it's too late.”

Vandana Shiva.

“For there is always light if only we are brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it.”

Amanda Gorman



Turtle Dreams



Turtle Resilience



Turtle Heirloom Seed Keeper



Turtle Hope



Turtle Water Protector



Turtle Expectations

Instructions for Viewing Exhibit

1. Greet each creation
as a potential friend.
No need to be afraid.
2. Allow each creation
--alluring, engaging--
to greet you back.
3. Just take your time.
Blink. Sigh. Relax.
4. Upon your departure,
retain the creations
in your spacious mind.
5. Upon your arrival home,
release the creations
into your life.
6. Let the creations arise
from a grove of trees,
from a frozen field,
from a hot parking lot...
7. Such is the way of art.

Lawson Fusao Inada
Oregon Poet Laureate Emeritus



BETTY LADUKE