

Benjamin Victor – Artist Statement



One cannot overstate the intelligence, work ethic, fortitude, selflessness, and compassion of Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte. The journey of creating a sculpture that encompasses her legacy has been both humbling and life-changing.

Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte is certainly larger than life. She was a leader, a doctor, a counselor, an educator, and a spiritual guide. The sculpture could have been 100 feet tall and still fell short of reaching the heights that this great woman reached in her lifetime.

The sculpture's design is centered around motion. Dr. Susan strides forward as the wind sweeps through her dress, coat, and shawl. The dynamic lines of her windswept drapery lead the viewer's eyes upward along the arc of her dress to her left hand, which holds her doctor's bag—an icon and emblem for her life's work. The doctor's bag refers to her most notable accomplishment as the first Native American doctor. Inside her doctor's bag are the tools of her trade; the tools she used to heal ailments, deliver babies, and help her people and others in the incredibly large area that she single-handedly served.

As the viewer's eyes move up from the doctor's bag, they reach her strong hand, which is clasped tightly to the shawl around her shoulders. Her hand, like her work boots, reflect a woman who wasn't afraid of hard work. Dr. Susan worked hard for her cause and for everything that she gained in her education and career. Her work ethic is one of the things that spoke to me the

most when reading her biography. She was absolutely tireless in pursuit of her education, and later her application of her medical expertise to help those in need.

Up from her clasped hand, the viewer's eyes are led to the portrait of Dr. Susan. She is gazing steadfastly into the distance. Perhaps she is contemplating the many hardships ahead, as she faces obstacles to her people's prosperity. If we look closely, we can see a subtle smile. Her face is undeniably vibrant and positive. It reflects the spirit of a young woman undaunted by the mountainous tasks ahead. She is an unrelenting force for positive change and her people's betterment.

As we look along the piece and our eyes move down and around from her gaze, we notice that the great Doctor's Victorian attire is interrupted by perhaps the most visually beautiful element of all. Her shawl is decorated with the traditional patterns of Omaha applique. The beauty of the applique and fringes blowing in the wind create a visual aesthetic perfectly fit for the 3-dimensional media of bronze sculpture. The shawl sweeps around the sculpture, wrapping the figure of Dr. Susan in her cultural heritage, both literally and metaphorically speaking.

It also creates a visually interesting design from every viewing angle, including both of the sides and back.

