



ERNIE

PEPION

1943–2006 Member of the Blackfeet Indian Tribe

Ernie Pepion was born on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Browning, Montana. He frequently spoke of the discrimination he experienced growing up Native on a reservation border town. He was a Vietnam Veteran, and returned to America in the late 1960's. In 1971, a car accident resulted in him becoming a quadriplegic. Despite this, he got his Bachelor's of Fine Art, and later his Master's of Fine Art, both from Montana State University in Bozeman. A MSU mechanical engineering class built an automatic easel to aid Pepion in his painting. He would hold his brush in his hand with a brace, and the easel would turn 180 degrees to allow him to reach all parts of his canvas.

"My work does more than document my life, it expresses my feelings... In my life I have experienced discrimination... I've been belittled and pitied. I have seen that some people, in ignorance, behave as though they are superior to those who are not of their race or who are disabled. They avoid interacting with those who are unlike them. Through painting I show my experience of these degradations. Painting allows me to be a person beyond the limitations of racial prejudice and disability."
-Ernie Pepion



Wounded Grand Marshall (1988)
Ernie Pepion
Oil on Canvas, 50"x65"