

**JOAN
HILL
1930-**



**MASTER
ARTIST**

In the 1800s, the Cherokees were an advanced culture, with a government organized under a constitution, alphabet for their language, and desire to educate their children as to the times. Yet despite the pressures of assimilation, the Cherokees have retained their heritage of arts and crafts. Their creativity can be seen in paintings, sculpture, colorful basketry, pottery, jewelry, beading and textile arts.

Joan Hill was born in 1930 in Muskogee. Her great-grandfather Creek leader Red Bird Harris settled on the Harris-Hill family farm in 1859. Known as Fort Davis, it was burned to the ground during the Civil War. Her family tree includes chiefs of both the Cherokee and Creek nations, humorist Will Rogers and Tiana Rogers, the Indian Territory wife of Sam Houston. There is a street and school in Muskogee named after the Harris family.

Hill graduated from Northeastern State University in 1952. After teaching art for four years, she devoted herself to painting fulltime. Because she had not been raised in a traditional Native American household, she worried that she lacked knowledge about her culture so her father taught her the legends that he had been taught. Noted Indian artist and teacher Dick West encouraged her to observe and learn from traditional Indian cultures, history, and art, which she has used to influence her art.

Hill is known for her stylized, acrylic paintings of historical and cultural scenes, employing a limited palette of neutrals, oranges, reds, and purples. She predominately painted Creek and Cherokee women. Her art today hangs at Five Civilized Tribes Museum, Philbrook Art Center, Smithsonian and Department of Interior Galleries in Washington, Heard Museum in Phoenix, Museum of the American Indian in New York City, and other public galleries.

In 1974, Hill was the first woman to receive the title of “Master Artist” by the Five Civilized Tribes Museum. When China temporarily lifted the ban on Western art and allowed art schools to reopen in 1978, Hill became one of only 24 American artists invited to meet with professors of the Central Art Academy of Peking, giving her the opportunity to introduce Native American artistic styles to China.

Hill was named one of the Smithsonian Institute's People of the Century. The Philbrook Museum awarded her the Waite Phillips Special Artists Trophy for lifetime achievement. Her work has been reproduced in various publications and film documentaries. By 2001 Hill had accumulated 270 awards for her paintings, making her the most honored American Indian woman artist. Her career has been an inspiration for both female and Native American artists for decades.

She was named Che-Se-Quah, Creek for Redbird, after both her great-grandfather and her maternal grandfather. The name Redbird implies striking colors and Hill has captured them without being splashy in her generous use of purples and shades of off-red. She receives up to \$3,000 for her paintings. One of her works was once valued at \$20,000 by a cultural arts specialist with the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington.