



CSU football great's art brings Comanche heritage to life

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By [Tony Phifer](#)



The bright, bold image of a Native American – wearing a traditional headdress and a business suit – on the side of an Oklahoma City building represents many things.

Mostly, it represents Eric Tippeconnic.



Former CSU football star Eric Tippeconnic has earned acclaim with his art depicting traditional and modern Comanche life.

“My work speaks to modern Native American culture,” he said. “We’re not a stereotype; we’re not a remnant of the past. We’re alive and part of our society. We’re not moving away from our traditions, but we are moving forward. We’re alive and well in our contemporary world.”

Tippeconnic (BA Humanities '92), whose father is Comanche and his mother a Denmark native, has long been passionate about his family heritage, doing extensive research into both cultures. His paintings often reflect his connections to his unique family background.

Making people think

But it is his talent for depicting Native American images – some very traditional, some depicting contemporary themes – that has earned the one-time CSU football star acclaim as a painter.

“My goal isn’t to make people feel uncomfortable, but to make them think and have discussion,” he said. “I want them to know what the modern-day Comanche is doing, and my paintings are a great way to close the gaps between disparate groups. Let’s face it – in this charged political climate we need more open doors, more open discussion.”

The mural project is a first for Tippeconnic, who [teaches history at Cal State Fullerton](#) and native studies at both Cal State Northridge and Cal State San Marcos. [Exhibit C, an Oklahoma City museum owned by the Chickasaw Nation](#), commissioned the project, and Tippeconnic’s entry was chosen from a field of hundreds of applicants.

Tippeconnic, 47, had no idea how to paint a mural so he utilized the modern-day, go-to teacher for instruction: YouTube.

Six-day process

First, he downloaded the original image on a Zip drive and projected the image on a wall at his home. Using large sheets of white paper, he traced the image’s outline and numbered the sheets.

Then, he spent a day cleaning the brick wall on the century-old building. Next came two coats of primer, followed by a coat of black paint and a coat of red, which served as the portrait’s background. He then traced the image on the red background and began painting.



Tippeconnic, who had no previous experience painting murals, traced the image on the side of the building. The process took six days to complete.

The 10 feet by 10 feet final product took six days to complete.

“It was my first mural so I had no idea what the process would be like, but I was really pleased with the way it turned out,” he said. “Once I got going it was almost like painting on canvas. I really enjoyed the process.”

The project has opened the door to some new opportunities for the former Ram, who helped lead the 1990 football team to a Freedom Bowl win over Oregon – the school’s first bowl berth in 42 years – and was voted onto CSU’s all-century team in 1992.

From April 13 of this year to January 1, 2019, 34 of his paintings will be featured in an exhibition called [“Comanche Motion: The Art of Eric Tippeconnic”](#) at the Bullock Museum in Austin, Texas. He’s also been commissioned to do a 72-foot wide mural on a building in Colony, Okla., and a smaller one in his hometown of Albuquerque.



Tippeconnic called his most recent work – a Comanche woman in business attire wearing a traditional headdress – some of his best work.

In the meantime, he will continue to paint what he feels while trying to keep up with his blended family: wife Suzy and daughters Emma, Thea, Zalen and Ava.

Pushing boundaries

He recently finished a painting of a Comanche woman in traditional business attire, wearing a beaver headdress.

“I’m confident it’s one of the best things I’ve done,” he said. “I just paint now, without a lot of hesitation and a lot less worrying about making mistakes. I’ve become bolder, willing to take chances.

“Sometimes my time at CSU seems like a lifetime ago. It was a huge part of my life, but none of my current students know I played football, and my kids don’t make a big deal of it. I can remember every part of it like it was yesterday – so many great friends and great memories – but now I get lost in teaching, my family and in my painting.

“Whether or not I sell another painting doesn’t matter because painting is what I love to do, and I’ll continue the rest of my life.”

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