Some questions for Jenny Medved from Mark Ormond, Curator of Exhibitions in August 2016

What draws you to your subject matter? The raw, natural beauty of indigenous cultures and practices. The music, regalia, colors, dance and history is so alive, and after many generations of economic and political challenges- many are continuing to preserve their culture, growing stronger while teaching others of their ancestral ways. It’s a beautiful experience to witness and be a part of.

How have your discoveries about your own ancestors influenced your painting? I come from North Georgia, where I have a long line of family history dating back to the Georgia gold rush and Cherokee and Choctaw removal- which makes it is hard to trace all of my ancestors. However, my family history plays a small part on why I paint what I do. My love for Native American and other Indigenous cultures have been based on instinct and respect- as well as personal reflections and experiences.

Do need to be inspired by a person to paint them? In my personal series of work, yes, definitely.

How important is exact authenticity to your renderings? Extremely important. I want my work to have nothing but pure authenticity, therefore if I make any changes at all- they are very small. I am not here to change anyone, only to humbly and respectfully record them onto paper.

Please describe your process. I photograph each model in their own environment, sometimes, taking hundreds of photos per shoot. I often spend several hours going through each photo before exporting a few into Photoshop to find which of my favorite compositions work best. I then erase the background, adding a gradient color to get a feel for how I will paint in the negative space. Because of the delicate nature of watercolor paper, I will often transfer the basic outline of my image onto my paper. However, at my easel, I spend much more time drawing in details and form until I am happy with the overall rendering. Once the drawing is complete, I tape my paper down to board, which helps prevent any buckling. In the past, I always started a portrait by painting in the eyes, completing them before moving onto the rest of the face and figure. However, now, I try to stay open to the organic nature of each painting, so I start with the shadows first- building up form and lighting. I paint by building up transparent layers of watercolor, as well as with a dry-brush technique, so my process rarely goes quickly. It may sometimes take me several weeks or more to complete a painting, depending on the size of the paper.

How does the negative space of the paper factor in your compositional planning? It is a very important aspect in my work. Because I leave the background open to the viewer to fill in what they want to see, the negative space has to frame my model’s gesture and be a part of the overall form. With a little bit of color to add shadow and enhance each space, it all has to work together so the painting doesn’t feel unbalanced.
*How does color function in your work?* Color- or even lack thereof, is very important. Depending on the mood of the painting- I may tone down my palette to get a warmer, nostalgic feel while brightening up other areas where I may want the viewer to focus on or a certain detail in my work. *What was the most important thing you learned at Ringling?* Hard work and time management- without either, I don’t think you will get very far.