

## Medford, Claude W., Jr.



### **Basketry (1941 - 1989)**

Claude Medford, a traditional southeast Indian artist and craftsman of Choctaw ancestry, learned to plait cane splint baskets in traditional styles at an early age. He was taught basketry by his Choctaw grandfather, a medicine man, who was born along the Camino Real between Natchitoches, Louisiana and Nacogdoches, Texas. From this point on, Medford became interested in the traditions and crafts of his tribe, as well as other Native American tribes.

Medford earned the Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology and art history at the University of New Mexico. After finishing school, Medford decided to go on the road and travel the states, from tribe to tribe, to research the heritage of his people. He lived with many Native American tribes, including the Alabama, Tunica-Biloxi, Coushatta, Pamunkey, Caddo, Delaware, and Yuchi. He learned to speak many Indian languages, including Alabama, Coushatta, and Choctaw, while staying with these tribes. He learned each tribe's style of basketry, which was important to him because of his grandfather's influence. Medford also learned pottery, woodworking, shell working, metal working, finger weaving, bead work, feather work, horn and hoof work, brain tanning of deer hide, leather working, and gourd work of each tribe.

Medford strove to preserve the heritage, culture, traditions, and languages of his people, as he worked with the Indian Program development. He taught classes and workshops at the American Indian Archaeological Institute in Washington, Connecticut, and the Clifton Choctaw Indian community west of Alexandria, Louisiana. Medford also received a fellowship from the Louisiana State Arts Council of the Louisiana Division of the Arts. This fellowship allowed him to return home to teach any Indian from the five surviving tribes of Louisiana that was interested. On his return to Louisiana, he became an artist-in-residence for the Williamson Museum and the Louisiana Folklife Center at Northwestern State University.

Medford participated in several festivals, including the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and the Natchitoches-NSU Folk Festival. Because of his contribution to preserving the heritage of his people and his talent in basketry, Medford was inducted into the Louisiana Folklife Center's Hall of Master Folk Artists in 1983.