

CARLOTA

Installation work by Lewis deSoto

Joshua Tree National Park Visitors Center, Twentynine Palms, California 2016/2017

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Installation by Lewis deSoto

Vocalizations by Erin Neff

Illustrations by Vincent Desjardins

2016-2017

Joshua Tree National Park Visitor Center,
Twentynine Palms, California

Created for SAND to STONE
organized by the 29 Palms Art Gallery
curated by Rhonda Lane Coleman
&
Part of DESERT-X, 2017


In 1909 the “Willie Boy Manhunt,” portrayed in news media of the time as the story of a drunken murder of a young girl’s father, a kidnapping, the abuse and murder of a young girl as well as attacks against a posse that tried to hunt the man down. Newspapers connected the man to the “Ghost Dance” phenomena which was described as an armed insurrection by Indians to start a holy war against whites. The so-called murder started in Banning, in Riverside County. At the time, President Howard Taft was to come visit the Mission Inn in Riverside. Media speculated that Indians may murder Taft or at least stage some violence. The Willy Boy murder was linked to a vast conspiracy (President William McKinley, eight years earlier had been shot and killed by an anarchist), even though the fatality was another Indian. The death of Carlota during the hunt was described as a wanton murder and sexual assault. “Willy Boy” took his own life in the Ruby Mountains because he was surrounded by a posse.

“Willy Boy’s” legendary skills as a runner were well known. The role of Carlota was always described as being a victim. She was helpless and hapless. Some research has shown that Carlota and Will (as I call them) were in love and that the murder of the father was likely an accident. The death of Carlota is in fact attributed to a distant rifle shot by a posse member. Will took his own life because of the announcement of the death of his beloved, not because he was trapped with nowhere to go. It was clear in the aftermath that he could have easily run from the posse.

I wrote the story from Carlota’s point of view. This version of the story is speculation, but to me, rings truer than the journalistic slant against Native Americans in the early 20th Century.

The work takes multiple forms. One is a “radio story” narrated by Emily Clarke (Cahuilla) and musical vocalizations by mezzo-soprano Erin Neff that can be listened to via internet streaming. Secondly as a staged interior gallery work with four channel audio surround sound. The form presented in this book is an installation at the Joshua Tree National Park Visitor Center in Twentynine Palms, California. The work is made of laser-etched plaques on stands that encompass the Visitor Center’s main pathway. The audio portion of the project consisted of musical vocalizations created by mezzo-soprano Erin Neff. The illustrations were created by Vincent Desjardins.

Lewis deSoto

A dramatic sunset or sunrise over a desert landscape. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, with a bright glow of light breaking through near the horizon. In the foreground, a winding path leads through dark, silhouetted vegetation, including several palm trees. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

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MY NAME IS CARLOTA

My name is Carlota.

I am seventeen years old.

The white man says the year is 1909.

My people are the Chemehuevi.

They came to this place long ago from
another planet.

That planet became too crowded
and our lord, a powerful being brought
us here.



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The white man says the year is 1909.
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1

I AM
SEVENTEEN
YEARS OLD

I LOVE TO RUN



I love to run. The younger men are given tasks to send messages and supplies back and forth through the desert. They are swift! Sometimes, when my chores are done, I wander out and follow them. I taunt them as I catch up and run past. “You are not fast enough to catch me!” I say, laughing. I dodge rocks, fleeing rabbits and the sharp cholla needles. I jump over snakes and fallen Joshua trees. I love the feeling, like floating over the earth. When I stop to catch my breath I am glowing with happiness.



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2

**I LOVE THE
FEELING,
FLOATING
OVER THE
EARTH**

A YOUNG MAN HAS COME TO THE OASIS



A young man has come to the oasis. His name is Will. They say he is family, but I do not know him. He is strange and powerful. I am drawn to him. He stares right into my spirit. He is a Ghost Runner. He runs faster and longer than all the other men. He has been in Arizona. He has spent time with Wovoka the Ghost Dancer. It is something new, this belief that drew all tribes together. It is foretold if all the People follow we will reunite with our lost loved ones, the white man will disappear and a new world will begin.



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3

HE IS A GHOST RUNNER

**ONE NIGHT WE
RUN INTO THE
DESERT
TOGETHER**



One night we run into the desert together.

He is beautiful.

His smell is intoxicating.

His eyes are strong.

My desire for him is compelling.

We stay that night together.

We listen to the whisper of
the creosote in the wind.

The earth and the stars are one with us.

We are in love.

I wish to be his betrothed.

WE ARE IN LOVE



**MY FATHER
AND MOTHER
SAY I CANNOT
BE GIVEN TO
THIS COUSIN**



We return to the oasis.
There is much drama.

My father and mother say that I cannot be given to this cousin. I do not feel the same. Will is asked to go away and my parents leave the oasis and take me to stay with the family of Jim Pine, a Serrano.

They think my heart will cool.
Months go by. I go to Banning where my family is picking fruit.

I am in so much pain!

It is not right and they do not understand that our spirits are the same.

A photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there is a large, tangled pile of dry brush and twigs. To the left, there are some green, leafy bushes. In the middle ground, a sandy path leads towards a residential area in the background. The houses are single-story with light-colored walls and dark roofs. The sky is clear and blue.

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MY FATHER IS A POWERFUL SHAMAN



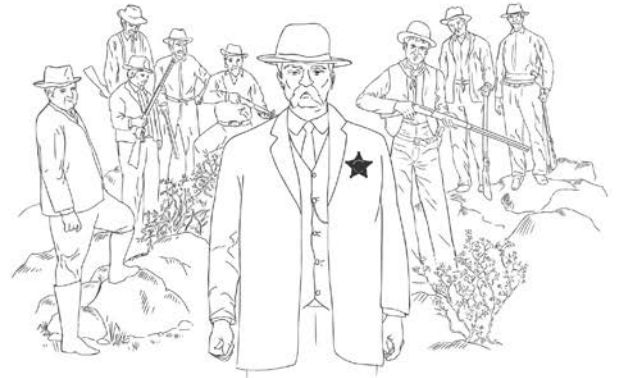
My father is a powerful shaman. I believe his word has made Will disappear. But one day Will comes to Banning. Will has his power from the Ghost Dance. He barely touches the earth. Yet he brings a rifle, the white man's power with him. My father says, "You don't need that!" but Will shrinks back, I can see he is afraid, but he presses his love for me. Father is angry. He reaches for the rifle and grabs the barrel, trying to pull it away. Will's finger is on the trigger and as my father pulls it, it goes off. My father is dead, shot through his eye.

MY FATHER IS DEAD, SHOT THROUGH THE EYE



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HIS SPIRIT IS GONE



My mother screams as
my father falls to the earth.

His spirit is gone.

She screams again, “Go! Go away! You have destroyed us!” Before I know it, my hand is in Will’s and we run, run into the desert. He still carries the rifle. Not long after, the white people who fear Indians and the Ghost Dance gather.

President Taft is coming to Riverside.
Is this the start of an Indian uprising?
Will President Taft be killed by Indians?

A posse is formed to look for us,
to capture us.

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WE RUN THROUGH MORONGO VALLEY



He is so fast and quiet. We are miles away and they must mount horses to find us. My father's spirit is gone and I'm following my own spirit with Will. We run through Morongo Valley. We rest at The Pipes in Yucca Valley. I cannot run as fast. Sometimes we find cattle troughs with water for us. Here we have run out of water and it is very hot. He knows of some cabins where there is food, places to find water. As night falls, he tells me to rest near the dry creek bed. He gives me his coat that was tied to his belt. He will run to the cabin and bring back cans of food and water. We will flee to Arizona where he has friends and family. Where the Ghost Dance is strong.

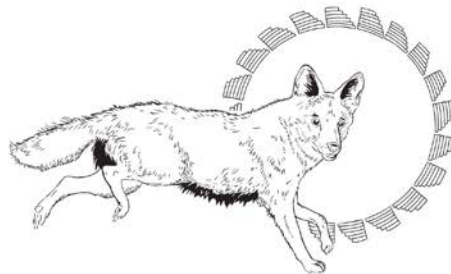
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8

THAT NIGHT I DREAM ABOUT SINAWAVA, COYOTE



That night I have a dream about Sinawava, Coyote. He dances around me. “You are swift!” He smiles, “You are a strong girl, listen, when you see the sun in the East, run straight into it and you will find your love.” I wake up in the cold desert night. It is windy. Why did he say that? I don’t like the dream but it is powerful medicine and I must learn its meaning. Am I a shaman now that my father has died? As the sun comes up, I stand up in the morning light. I hear a pop and feel a strange heat, first in my back and then my breast. I put my hand there and there is blood. I hear Coyote’s words again as my spirit rises from my body. From high up I see a white man with a rifle who has shot me. I rise higher and I see Will gathering food in a cabin. I see the posse throw my body on a wagon. Some of them ride north. I rise higher still and see the sun and run to the light.

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Some of them ride north. I rise higher still and see
the sun and run to the light.

I AM A SPIRIT NOW



I am a spirit now. I see Will spot the posse. He is confused and desperate. He starts running. He runs for four days. He hides in the Ruby Mountains. The posse is gathered below him. They call out to him that I am dead. He shrieks and shoots one of them, the man named Reche. He shoots at the horses and they scatter. The night falls and I can see Coyote. He suddenly appears before Will. I don't know what he says. Coyote flies past me with a grin on his face. Coyote still frightens me, but he has helped me...why?



I SEE WILL SPOT THE POSSE



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WILL IS SUMMONING HIS POWER



I see Will wake up. I hear the men from the posse yelling at him. Calling him “Willie Boy,” like he is a slave. They hate him. I can see the dark clouds around them, like thick smoke. Will is summoning his power. It is getting near dawn and I see him carefully place things around him. He makes a little flame and blows the smoke around his body. He removes his shoe and holds the rifle with his feet so it is pointed at his chest.

He pulls the trigger with his toe. There is a light everywhere for a moment. He is free! I see his spirit head to me and again I feel him touch me.

We run toward the sun.



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11

THERE IS LIGHT
EVERYWHERE
FOR A
MOMENT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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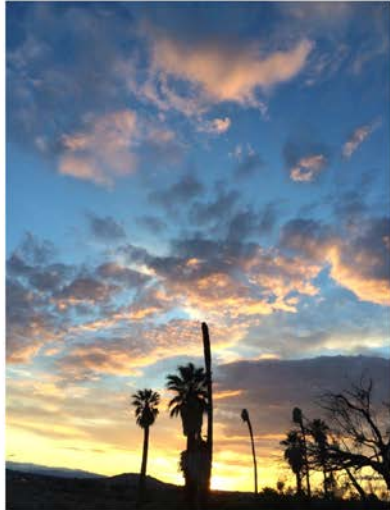
Lewis deSoto's story and sound installation, *Carlota*, is part of a multi-disciplinary art project entitled *Sand to Stone: Contemporary Native American Art in Joshua Tree*. This project highlights contemporary Native American artists from tribes (Cahuilla, Chemehuevi, Mojave and Serrano) with significant cultural ties to Joshua Tree National Park. The goal of the combined components – deSoto's site-specific installation, the exhibition at the 29 Palms Art Gallery, and the Bird Singing & Dancing performances – is to increase awareness about Native American art and culture, inspire new dialogues about old histories, foster cross-cultural relationships, and encourage our communities to engage with the park.

Artists included in *Sand to Stone* draw from their indigenous roots and challenge preconceived notions about Native American art. Their artwork reaches beyond stereotypical imagery of Chiefs wearing feather headdresses and statues of Indians on horseback. Although Native American artists continue to work in traditional art forms (basketry, beading and pottery), significant work is also being produced in a variety of media – photography, video, and installation. This project invites us to reconsider long-held assumptions and inspires discussions about cultural mythologies, relationships with land, and the complexities of the modern Native American experience.

For more information, please visit www.sandtostone.org.

This project is organized by Rhonda Lane Coleman for the 29 Palms Art Gallery and Joshua Tree National Park, and is made possible, in part, by the California Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional support provided by the Tribal Alliance of Sovereign Indian Nations and the California Wildlands Grassroots Fund of Rose Foundation. In-kind support provided by Copper Mountain College, Joshua Tree National Park Council for the Arts, and Benchmark Studios.





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