



COLLEEN FLORES makes sculptures from alabaster such as this Calais Lily to her left and The Omahan Singing the Midnight Water Song (right), which is a work in progress. Flores does most of her work, which is inspired from her Omaha Tribe upbringing, at her home in Lincoln.

# CAREFULLY SCULPTED DREAMS

*Artistic Differences*  
An ongoing look at ethnic contributions to  
Nebraska state culture.

Story by  
**Liza Holtmeier**

Photo by  
**Lane Hickenbottom**

*UNL senior celebrates heritage through art*

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COLLEEN FLORES  
senior art major

Standing in his sculpture garden in Albuquerque, N.M., Allan Houser drew a line in the sand. He asked the art students in front of him who of them was going to make a living at sculpting.

Colleen Flores was the only one to cross over the line.

Impressed by her conviction, Houser led Flores through his garden.

“He showed me. He asked me what I saw,” said Flores, a senior art major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Flores, a member of the Omaha tribe, says she was destined to be a sculptor.

In the early '90s, when she was accepted into the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe, N.M., she asked Wakonda, or God, for guidance.

“I asked him to show me what I would do,” Flores said. “And then I knew I was going to be a sculptor.”

That adamant faith impressed people like Houser, another American Indian sculptor and one of Flores' greatest artistic influences.

“Once, after seeing my sculpture of a lily, he closed his eyes and said, ‘You’re going to be a great sculptor. Take care of your health,’” Flores said.

With encouragement such as this, Flores has continued to explore and refine her artistic skills. All the while, she has used her talent to celebrate her Omaha heritage.

“She uses traditional Omaha symbols, but she also has modern-day images of American Indians to

represent a concept or an issue or a message,” said Cynthia Willis-Esqueda, a UNL associate professor of psychology and ethnic studies.

The combination of the traditional with the modern gives Flores' work a contemporary feel that emphasizes the issues of American Indians today.

Willis-Esqueda, who is the coordinator for Native American studies at UNL, said Flores also emphasized her Omaha spirituality in her work.

In Flores' newest work in progress, “Omahan Midnight Singer,” that spirituality is the main focus. The piece was inspired by the faces of Flores' tribal elders when they sing.

“When they're singing, I wonder what they are thinking about because tears will fall,” Flores said. “They're really into the singing. They're sweating. It's the most beautiful sight.”

Flores achieves these powerful emotions by combining meticulous technique with kinetic energy, said Juanita Barry, Flores' former academic advisor at the Institute.

“I would probably compare her to a Georgia O'Keeffe in sculpture,” Barry said.

When sculpting, Flores prefers to create in stone.

“When I'm chiseling, it just comes naturally to me,” she said. “Of course, you have to do your drawing. You have to do your model. But then it just comes.”

The most important thing she has to remember, she said, is the stone's heaviness.

“You get so involved with it, you forget. You smash your fingers. You scrape your fingers,” she said, laughing.

These qualities of the medium

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