

# ARTIST'S STATEMENT

## *The Flute Player*

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Keith Nolan

There are many stories about how different North American native Peoples discovered the flute. A common character in these stories is the woodpecker, who put holes in hollow branches searching for food. The wind would blow through and around these branches, creating sounds that the natives noticed and later sought to recreate. Over time, the instrument evolved into different materials being used in its creation but initially, virtually all types of woods were used for flutes. My personal favorite is cedar because of its smell.

Flutes had many different configurations, from 2 to 8 holes. These flutes were fairly easy to make and may have contributed to the design of what is commonly referred to as the plains style flute. This is the style of flute that most native flute players use today. The instrument was so advanced that little changes have been made in the last 150 years or so.

The flutes were used for different dances and spirit calling ceremonies. Flutes were also used for entertainment by many tribes while travelling. Some tribes would perform powerful prayer ceremonies with their flutes while others used the flute for courting and love songs. The flute was originally a very personal instrument — it was played without accompaniment in courtship, healing, meditation and spiritual rituals.

One of the most popular uses for the native flute was for courting — to attract a mate. The legend also says that once you got a mate, you were to put the flute away and never play in public again, because if you played it again, you might attract someone else.

In my painting, *The Flute Player*, the young native man is playing his flute. Is he playing in solitude or is he playing his flute to attract a mate? This painting is incomplete without your input. It is up to the viewer to complete the painting and make it their own personal story. Are there more questions than answers and why is this young man playing his flute?