Works by James Fendenheim

Tohono O’odham Mountain Bracelet and Earrings
Made in 2014, courtesy of Arizona State Museum gift shop with permission of the artist.

Artist statement about piece: The Sonoran Desert mountains are a reflection of my backyard, my home. The earrings' shape, sort of a hook, are a reference to something sharp, like a thorn on many of the desert plants. The bracelet slops from 2 inches wide to a half inch wide to give it perspective, like the perspective you see when looking at the mountains.

Desert Law Necklace
Made in 2009, Arizona State Museum collection

Artist statement about piece: I call this piece “Desert Law,” as nature, not man, controls the law of the Sonoran desert. That's why I use the star badge—it is the desert who is on control. The piece has 18 karat gold, silver, Bisbee turquoise—all mined in Arizona. It also has quartz from Brazil in it. The hands are me holding the piece together. I use the hands a lot. The horse is a Papago pony to relate to a story my grandmother told me.

To Highway Serpent Bracelet
Made in 1999, Arizona State Museum collection

Artist statement about piece: This piece refers to Indian Road 86 that runs through the Tohono O’odham reservation. The serpent represents the perilous serpent of the highway—referring to all the death that occurs along this road because of drinking and driving. The skull alludes to that too, like the roadside crosses and shrines erected along the highway where people have died in accidents. This one has my initials on it rather than my newer stamp.

Man in the Maze Necklace
Made in 2014, courtesy of the artist.

Artist statement about piece: Man in the Maze is tour top tribal symbol. It’s kind like the cross to Catholics—that powerful a symbol. The meaning is almost secretive. Each person has his own maze to follow in life. It speaks to people on a personal level—it represents my way of life.

Man in the Maze story from We R Native website
http://www.wernative.org/SubTopicDetails.aspx?id=299&type=MyCulture
This figure is called Se:he or l’itoi ("Big Brother") in the Tohono O’odham language. He is shown at the top of a labyrinth, or maze, and is often referred to as the “Man in the Maze”. For the Tohono O’odham, the symbol represents a person’s journey through life. The twists and turns represent choices made in life; with each turn, man becomes more understanding and stronger as a person.

In the middle of the maze, a person finds their dreams and goals. At the center (the last turn in the design), man has a final opportunity to look back upon his or her choices and path before they pass into the next world. Several other tribes related to the Tohono O’odham use the same or similar symbol, sometimes with a slightly different interpretation.

Here is how Alfreda Antone, a Tohono O’odham tribal member, sees Se:he and the labyrinth:

"Elder Brother lived in the maze ... and the reason why he lived in the maze was because ... I think how I'm gonna say this ... magician or oh, medicine man that can disappear, and that can do things, heal people and things like that ... that was Elder Brother ... Se:he ... they called him ... he lived in there ... but he had a lot of enemies so he made that, and to live in there people would go in there but they couldn't find him ... they would turn around and go back.

"But in real life ... when you look at the maze you start from the top and go into the maze ... your life, you go down and then you reach a place where you have to turn around ... maybe in your own life you fall, something happens in your home, you are sad, you pick yourself up and you go on through the maze ... you go on and on and on ... so many places in there you might ... maybe your child died ... or maybe somebody died, or you stop, you fall and you feel bad ... you get up, turn around and go again ... when you reach that middle of the maze ... that's when you see the Sun God and the Sun God blesses you and says you have made it ... that's where you die."

The maze is a symbol of life...happiness, sadness...and you reach your goal...there's a dream there, and you reach that dream when you get to the middle of the maze...that's how I was told, my grandparents told me that's how the maze is."

**Related Images**

Map of southern Arizona/northern Mexico showing Tohono O’odham Nation and Tucson locations

Seal of the Tohono O’odham Nation.
The Tohono O’odham Nation is a federally recognized tribe located in southwestern and central Arizona. Tohono O’odham translates as “desert people” and our people have lived in the region since time immemorial. We have a rich history and culture that continues to thrive today. –from the Tribal Chairman, http://www.tonation-nsn.gov/

Constable Star badge, circa 1927, Tucson. Worn by Constable Fred Wilding. Arizona Historical Society, Southern Division collection

Photograph “Entering the Tohono O’odham Nation,” by Terrol Dew Johnson

Photograph “Saguaro National Park,” by Jörn Napp, October 2006

Photograph “Barrel Cactus” from Cambridge University Botanic Gardens, July 2010

Rattlesnake drawing from The Wild Man at Home: or, Pictures of Life in Savage Lands ... With woodcuts ... and Coloured Illustrations, page 176, from the British Library

Two photographs of roadside crosses on the Tohono O’odham Nation, Route 86, from http://www.pbase.com/ravenoaks/roadside_memorials_on_the_reservations&page=1