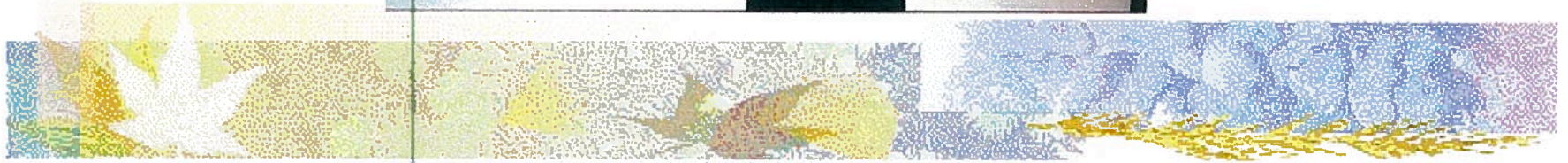


Laura Lee Harris



**A deeper look inside Canadian
Native art**

By: Julia Crocco



1) Ten Interesting Points About Her Life

- 1) Laura grew up in a household of many expressions, which encouraged her to become an artist
- Both her mother & grandmother drew and painted in respective styles
- 2) By the time she was 18, she had moved 20 times
- 3) her husband had allowed her to quit her job so she could focus on her children and her art
- 4) In 1993 she was nominated as an Honour Student at the Ontario College of Art & Design
- 5) in 1994 she learned that her French grandfather was also Sioux, Cree, Chippewyan, Ojibwe and Montagnais
- This part of her past was kept a secret



1) Ten Interesting Points About Her Life Continued

- 6) In 1998, was asked to create an original piece & 200 limited edition prints for the Canadian banking industry
- This is where she spoke to the elements of the work on wood and spherical forms of Earth
- 7) Laura wrote poetry with each piece of work on wood
- 8) 2006 she was commissioned by the Fort Erie Bridge Authority to create 3 paintings and were transferred onto glass
- These paintings became the windows of welcome into Canada
- 9) Laura's work has been televised, in interview, on news channels, newspapers, magazines etc.
- 10) She is on Boards and Committees of many Aboriginal Organizations



2) Laura's Inspiration

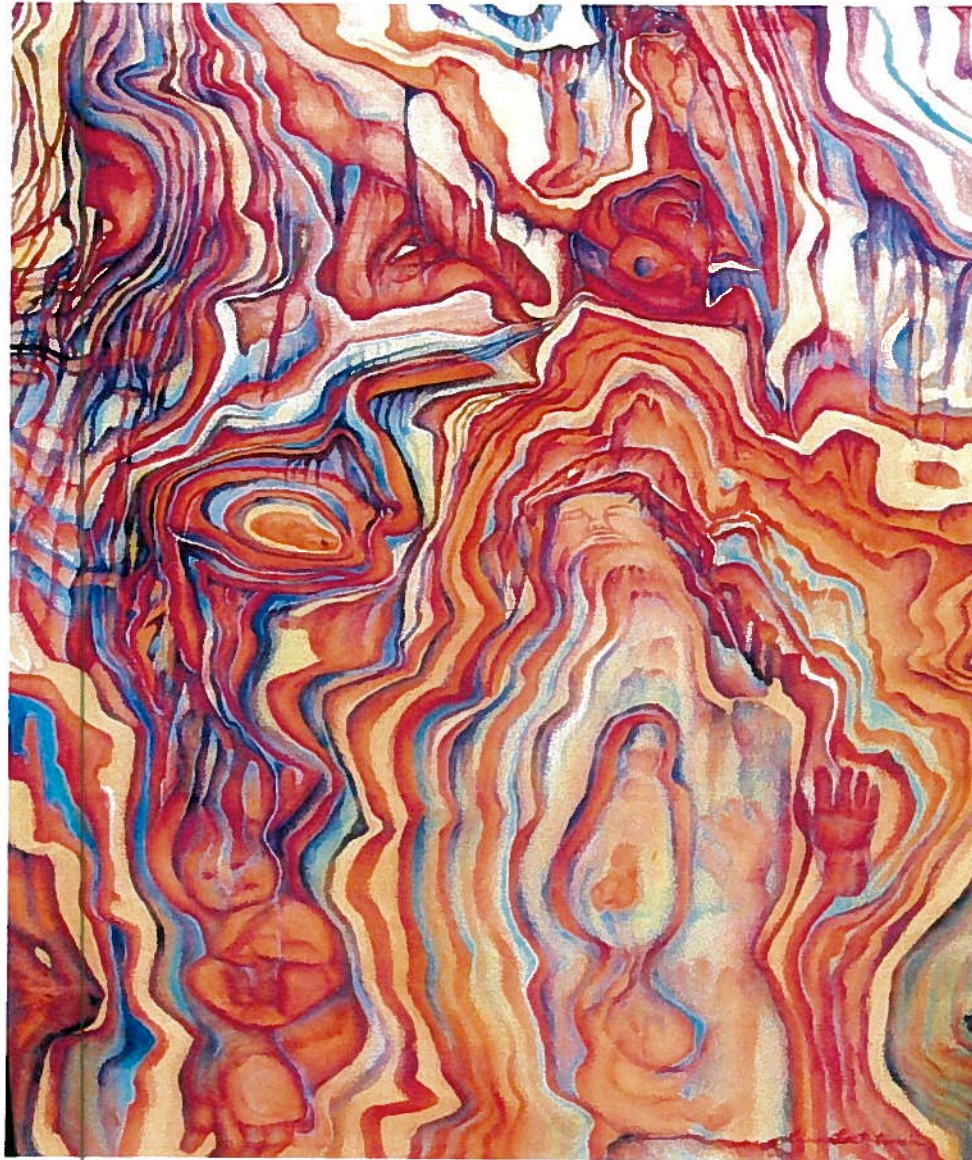
- Laura was inspired by the sadness and goodness of the people of her Native heritage, which she had not discovered until she was 38 years old. In 1993, she met a long lost Uncle who was searching for his missing past, because he was adopted when he was 2 years old. He has discovered that his French father was also Sioux, Cree, Chippewyan, Ojibwe and Montagnais
- At that time, the Natives had faced harsh racism. It was so cruel that it forced most of the Native people into hiding to protect their children from it.



2) Laura's Inspiration Continued

- His mother had to give him up when he was 2, and even though she tried to get him back when he was 4, she had to leave him for good. Laura's Uncle was too late because his mother had died in 1986. She had never spoken of her first child, she only grieved about him in poems. These poems were later found by Laura's mother, who didn't even know why her mother had grieved.
- This had caused her personal growth, because she had learned about the traditions, truth and history of her heritage and the traditional teachings of the Earth. This is evident in her work because the majority of her art and poems are centered around nature.

3) My Favorite Piece: Ancestors ~ Family Relations





3) My Favorite Piece

- My favorite piece by Laura Lee Harris is entitled *Ancestors~Family Relations*. This piece intrigued me because I feel it is a reflection of what Laura had discovered about her family's history and the story of her grandmother having to give up her son. I found that story to be very tragic, but at the same time very heroic because the grandmother only wanted what was best for her son, and was very strong.
- The other thing that intrigued me was how I was able to read the title and look at the picture, and know right away what story I felt it was trying to tell, and what each figure represented.



3) My Favorite Piece Continued

- In the picture there are many faces of women. I feel this represents how her grandparents were from five different Aboriginal tribes. Each face represents each tribe: Sioux, Cree, Chippewyan, Ojibwe and Montagnais. Some of the figures have babies within them and I feel they represent the grandmother's son.
- The way the babies are within the woman represents the fact that even though the grandmother had given up her son, he was still a part of her and completed her. This is true because the grandmother had grieved about her son in her poems.
- Therefore, I feel that the story Laura is trying to tell in this painting is her family's past which she had uncovered. The fact that her ancestors were Native, and the decision her grandmother had to make.

4) My Favorite Poem- Ancestors~Family Relations

Grandmothers

I say I am sorry for what you gave up
For not being allowed your real names

You are not forgotten

And I am thankful

That your tribe name survived

I honour you

And say I remember you

And though your words

Were not heard

I remain to say

That I am part of what

You left behind

And I am coming full circle

To say

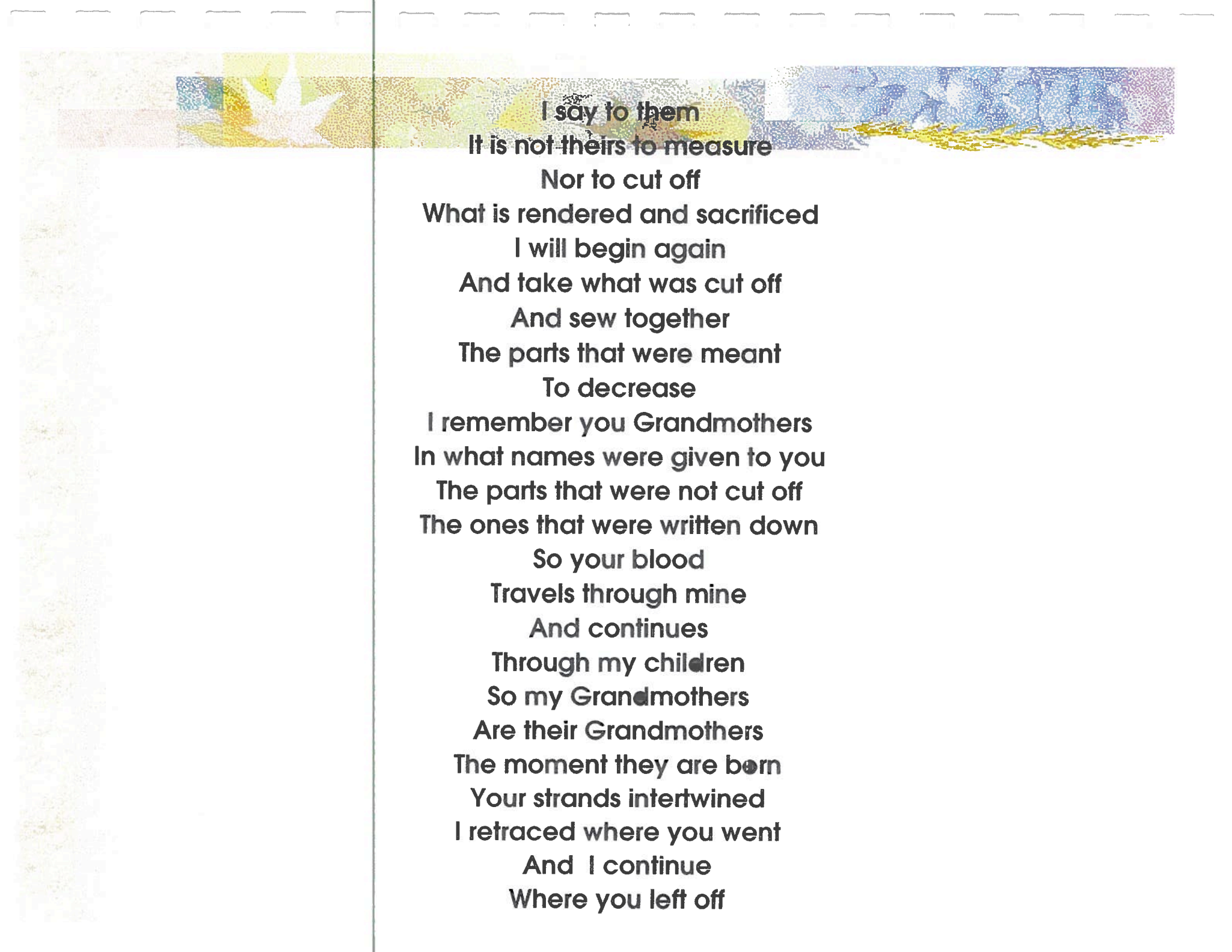
I continue in each way

See me

I am a part of all that became undone

No matter what blood is measured

By those who have none



I say to them
It is not theirs to measure
Nor to cut off
What is rendered and sacrificed
I will begin again
And take what was cut off
And sew together
The parts that were meant
To decrease
I remember you Grandmothers
In what names were given to you
The parts that were not cut off
The ones that were written down
So your blood
Travels through mine
And continues
Through my children
So my Grandmothers
Are their Grandmothers
The moment they are born
Your strands intertwined
I retraced where you went
And I continue
Where you left off



To my Ojibwe Grandmother
Maire Charlotte Sauteux
Who became a Couvret in
Seventeen hundred
And fifty three
Who had Angélique
Boozhoo and Miigwetch
Greetings and Thank you

To my Montagnaise/Chipewyan Grandmother
Louise Montagnaise/Chipewyan
Who became a St-Germain
And had Françoise
I greet you with my heart
As I cannot find your tongue
And say thank you

To my Sioux Grandmother
Marie Siouse/Sioux
Who became a Boucher
And had Paul
Welcome and Thank you
Toksha ake wacinyuanktin ktelo unci



I shall see you again Grandmother

Wayo kapi

It is the truth

To my Cree Grandmother

Suzanne Crise/Cree

Who became a Parenteau

And had Marie

I say Wat chia ~ Chin is kum kin

Welcome and Thank you

Tanasin casoine

What is your name?

Mamaskatch eka e kiskeyittamân tanisi e isihikasuyan

It is surprising

That don't even know what's your name?

We will begin again Grandmothers

And even though

You were forced to forget your tongue

My heart speaks the same one

And we will begin again

By:LauraLee K. Harris

<http://www.lauraleekharris.com/>



4) My Favorite Poem

- The message of the poem is that everyone should embrace their heritage, be proud of where they came from, and be willing to continue on the legacy of their culture.
- This is because in the poem, Laura is very proud of what her ancestors achieved. Example: *To my Sioux Grandmother Marie Siouse/Sioux, Who became a Boucher.*
- She is thankful for the sacrifices they had made for their culture. Example: *I say I am sorry for what you gave up. For not being allowed your real names .You are not forgotten, and I am thankful that your tribe name survived.*
- And she promises to continue on the legacy of their culture. Example: *I retraced where you went and I continue where you left off.*



4) My Favorite Poem Continued

- I chose this poem because of how strongly Laura expressed the pain she felt for what her ancestors had to go through. They had to face intense racism because they were Native, and were forced to give up their culture, such as their names and language. Laura recognizes all of the hardships her ancestors had to go through, and this brings awareness to the public of how wrong racism is.
- Another reason I chose this poem is because of the way Laura expresses how thankful she is to her ancestors. She is thankful that they had sacrificed so much so their family and culture could live on. She expresses how proud she is to be of Native descent, and promises to try her best to continue on the Native culture.



4) Poetry and Art

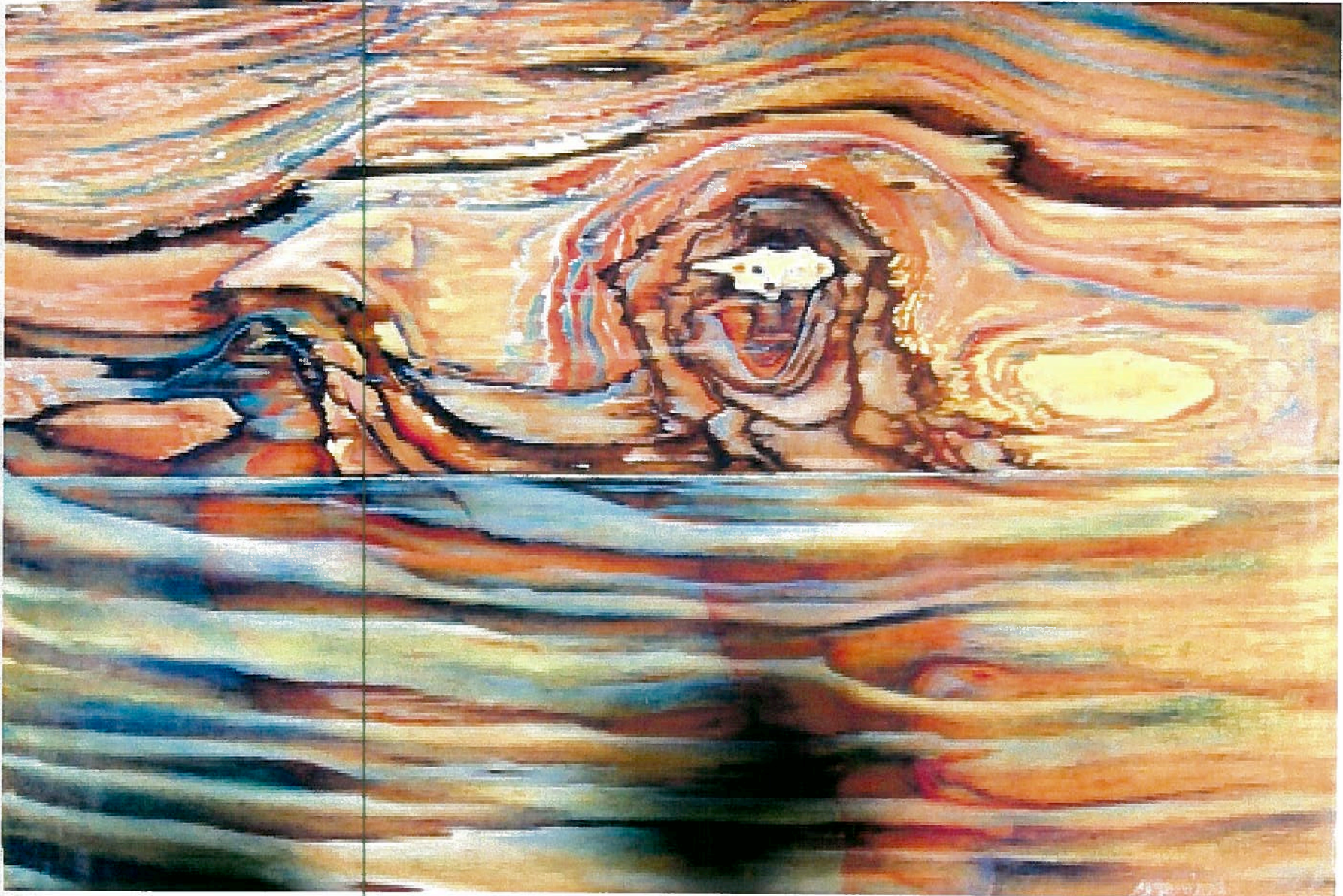
- Poetry and art make a successful and expressive combination because they are both beautiful ways to tell a story, or express an emotion and they both compliment each other.
- The art gives you a visual of the story or emotion the artist is trying to portray. The poem explains what the art represents, tells you what the story about and what it means.



5) Laura's Style of Art

- If I had to describe Laura's work who didn't know about her, I would say that it is very spiritual and is mainly centered around nature. This is because her background is Aboriginal, and she embraces her culture in her artwork.
- Her work is also very detailed because with each painting, she writes a poem to reflect what she drew.
- Laura is very close to nature and that is reflected in her art. Most of her art tells a story about the elements of mother nature. Laura uses nature as her canvas by painting her pictures on wood. She uses the shapes and patterns in the wood to her advantage.
- For example, in her piece *The Dance of the North* (see next slide) she uses the circles in the wood as the face of a wolf, and as the sun setting.

5th The Dance of The North





5) Laura's Style of Art Continued

- Laura is very spiritual because she uses her artwork to tell stories and to communicate with family members who have passed. For example, her piece *Ancestors ~ Family Relations* is about the hardships her ancestors went through. In the poem, she talks to her ancestors, thanking them for all they have done and reassuring them their Native spirit will live on.

6) Virtual Gallery Experience

- I visited the *Gallery of Messages Between Red and Blue 2006*. I enjoyed this gallery because I found that it was spiritual and in tuned with nature.
- I could see that the pieces were spiritual and in tuned with nature just by reading the titles, such as *Living In Harmony With Creation*, and by the expressions of the figures in the pieces
- Every single piece was different, and I could tell by the intricate detail of the pieces that they each told a very important story.
- LauraLee had used very beautiful colours, and the colours of each piece blended together very nicely.
- For example: I loved the soft colours used in the piece *When the Sky Woman Was Falling*(seen below). I thought the colours blended perfectly with each other.



6) Virtual Gallery Experience Continued

- My favorite piece from the gallery was *Red Roads Protection* (seen below) because I loved the way Laura had used the circles in the wood as part of the wings of the Eagles
- I also loved the bold colours and intricate detail in those circles of the Eagles because it really makes them stand out.
- I can tell that there is a lot of inspiration and an important story behind this piece



6) LauraLee's Reviews and Latest Projects

- Gilbert A. Bouchard said in his article entitled *Harris strives to go with the grain* (featured in The Edmonton Journal on November 17, 2006) that the process she uses to create her hybrid images are unique and detail-oriented.
- The University of South Dakota said this: *Her award winning artwork and poetry are not only breathtaking, but provide a unique insight into Native American culture and history. Discovering Ms. Harris' art is like a whole new world full of beauty and meaning.*
(<http://www.usd.edu/1hsl/RealSD/Explore.cfm?searchType=Advanced&Find=Keywords:Art>)
- Developed by ID Weeks Library-Maintained by the History Department-The University of South Dakota 2006

©

- LauraLee's latest project was a collection of pictures entitled *Gallery of Messages Between Blue and Red 2006*



7) The Difference Laura has made in Canadian Art

- I think the difference Laura has made to Canadian art the awareness she brings to the public about the Aboriginal culture. Through her artwork she describes how they felt, how they lived, and what was important to them, such as nature.
- By reflecting her heritage through her work, she has taught the public of the wonderful ways of the Aboriginals, the horrible racism they had to go through and the tragic sacrifices they had to make.
- It is important that Laura teaches Canadians about Native culture and history because it is part of Canada's history as well.
- Through her artwork she embraces her heritage and by doing so, she encourages other artists to do the same. To let their heritage inspire them and to reflect on it through their art.



7) Laura as an Advocate for Aboriginal Art

- She has been an advocate for aboriginal art and expression because she expresses her knowledge, thoughts and feelings of the Aboriginal culture in her art.
- She continues on the Aboriginal way of life because she creates her pieces and poems in the Aboriginal fashion. She does this by creating very spiritual pieces centered around nature and acknowledging her ancestors in her poems.
- All in all, her artwork expresses her Aboriginal heritage.

8) Laura's Contribution to the Anishnawbe Health of Toronto



- The Anishnawbe Health of Toronto is a centre where they improve the health and well being of Aboriginal People. Their health care is based on the Aboriginal culture and traditions.
- LauraLee feels the need to contribute part of her earnings to the Anishnawbe Health of Toronto because she feels that giving back is an important part of growing and becoming complete.
- LauraLee is very proud of her Aboriginal heritage and has recognized the pain and suffering they had to go through.
- Contributing to the Anishnawbe Health of Toronto is the perfect opportunity for LauraLee to help other Aboriginals and to grow into wholeness.



8) Artists Exposing Social Issues

- Artists expose and address social issues by expressing or reflecting on a social issue in their artwork. The theme of one of their pieces could be a particular social issue, and the figures within the theme could represent the different elements which make up the issue.
- This is an effective way to expose social issues .By looking at a piece, people can actually see the emotions which result from the particular social issue because the artist has tried to make that emotion obvious in the figures and colours of the piece. By looking at the artist's work, the people will become more aware of what is happening in society.



The End!!!

