



## LAURALEE K. HARRIS

### ARTIST STATEMENT

In a traditional sense, natural elements from Mother Earth have always been our template for how we live, giving us stories or defining our culture, our rituals, our cycles, our sacred spaces and practices, our meaning for life. Here I use the grains from a slice of the inside time of a tree, the Standing People, plied flat and glued onto board, it is their creation that defines my voice, my work. This becomes a template into my mind's eye, their spirit telling me what is; I am spiritually moved by this process of finding meaning from the insides of the tree. But in a contemporary sense; plywood, by its very creation, has its life of lines frozen for all time as plywood, its spirit ignored in hardware stores, used constructively to build homes, as a barricade against Mother Earth's elements, or to prop us up away from the earth in beds and chairs and tables, holding us aloof from what sustains us.

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Messages Between Blue and Red



## LauraLee K Harris

From the 2006 Series 'Messages Between Blue and Red', this book describes the processes of Spiritual Ceremony of creating from the Creation of Life, the standing ones, the trees.

The two paintings represented here are "Blue Roads ~ Answering Prayers" and "Red Roads ~ Protection" and is the story of how one painting became two which were meant to be together in a spiritual ending meant for healing. It shows how the meaning of life is there to be intuited if we look into our hearts and our earth, which holds our answers.

# Messages Between Blue and Red

A Ceremony of Creating From the Creation of Life

By LauraLee K. Harris

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## BIOGRAPHY: LAURALEE K. HARRIS

LauraLee K. Harris was born in Toronto but spent her formative years moving almost every year, immersing herself in a variety of art programs provided by the eight Public and High schools she attended. She studied art at OCAD and took drawing, painting portraiture at Fort Lauderdale Art School in Florida and also at the Forest Hill Art School. Harris began to seek her Anishinabe roots in 1996, when an Uncle introduced himself along with her ancestry. "I've always known but didn't know" she has said many times, finding this to be the inspiration for her work, and learning the knowledge about herself in cultural identity. Harris has explored crossing the boundaries of her life into art as one, creating work that has been termed 'Healing'.

Harris has been exhibiting since the early 80's. Among her many solo exhibitions are: a 'Retrospective ~ 1996-2008' at the Woodland Cultural Museum, Brantford, curated by Judy Harris; Messages Between Blue and Red at the Bearclaw Gallery in Edmonton, Alberta, curated by Jackie Bugera and Across Boundaries at St. Joseph's College, Toronto. Her most recent exhibition nibi anishinabe kwe wag ~ Water and the First Nations Women, opened at the Tom Thomson Gallery in Owen Sound and curated by Virginia Eichhorn, was dedicated to the over 600 Anishinabe women missing or murdered in Canada. This exhibit was honoured with the support of the Chiefs of Ontario, sending a traditional water keeper to do a blessing for those women and for the water.

She has participated in numerous important group exhibitions including Ancestral Bonds: Portraits, a touring exhibition through Alberta's North; Image of Indigenous Freedom at The Arts Project in London, Ontario; Stories From the Circle, at the Hatathli Museum Dine College, in Tsaiile, Arizona; Realms of Illusion, at the Agora Gallery in Soho, New York; and Beautiful at the Period Gallery, Omaha, Nebraska, curated by Lawrence Bradshaw, where her work was awarded the Award of Excellence and Special Recognition.

Harris' was Commissioned by the Buffalo Fort Erie Peace Bridge in an installation called Mewinsha – Long Ago, to create 3 works on wood. These images on wood were transferred onto glass for the Buffalo/Fort Erie Peace Bridge Authority Building and Museum's windows, becoming the welcome into Canada.

Her groundbreaking work creating a unique media has been studied in numerous high schools, engaging her processes for the art Segment of their Canadian Curriculum and has also been studied in many Universities Internationally. Most recently, The Nanaimo Correctional Centre for the Aboriginal literacy program, finding the work "inspirational" in healing as well as instrumental in their literacy course development materials.

Harris's considerable influence as an artist, innovator, writer/poet and philanthropist was recently honoured in a documentary, produced by; earth magic media, a Dene owned Production Company based in Edmonton, Alberta, highlighting Harris's work and story of her life.

# Messages Between Blue and Red

## A Ceremony of Creating From the Creation of Life.

The story that follows occurred, when painting on a piece of Fir Plywood, using the grains of the wood to depict and find imagery and then meaning, the piece was cut, divided in an uneven half. Not knowing what it was going to be, its ultimate destiny would be that it would rejoin as a diptych, many years later. Like many of the wood pieces I create, their subject matter and meaning are only determined after or during their Creation. This process of creating is quite different from the European mainstream ways, where subject, colour, values, composition are all worked out in advance; this way of working I term; backward in comparison to the mainstream ways of Creating, because the theme, knowledge, understanding comes after or while the painting is created. As with the traditional ways of creating, the planning and preconceived ideas take away from the happenstance of the universe and natural ways of being, creating, doing and living. It is only after all the series are created that a theme is determined, quite different from controlling and manipulating materials with a prior mindset. This free flowing process allows for a deeper inner reflection and freer knowledge flow, when harnessing the heart and the spirit as well as the mind and the hand with the life inherent in the wood grains; the tree's growing time as well as trusting the knowledge which exists within the self. A trust is initiated with the self and the universe as the dialogue meanders.

*“Mamatowisowin defines the methodology used in a quest for vision, where the seeker/artist begins to explore his/her own existence subjectively. By placing one's self into a direct stream of consciousness, the seeker/the knower/the artist will begin to unfold a greater, inherent understanding of self, by utilizing the methodologies of 'mamatowisowin'. Willie Ermin, Cree Elder and Scholar; First Nations Education in Canada; The Circle Unfold.*

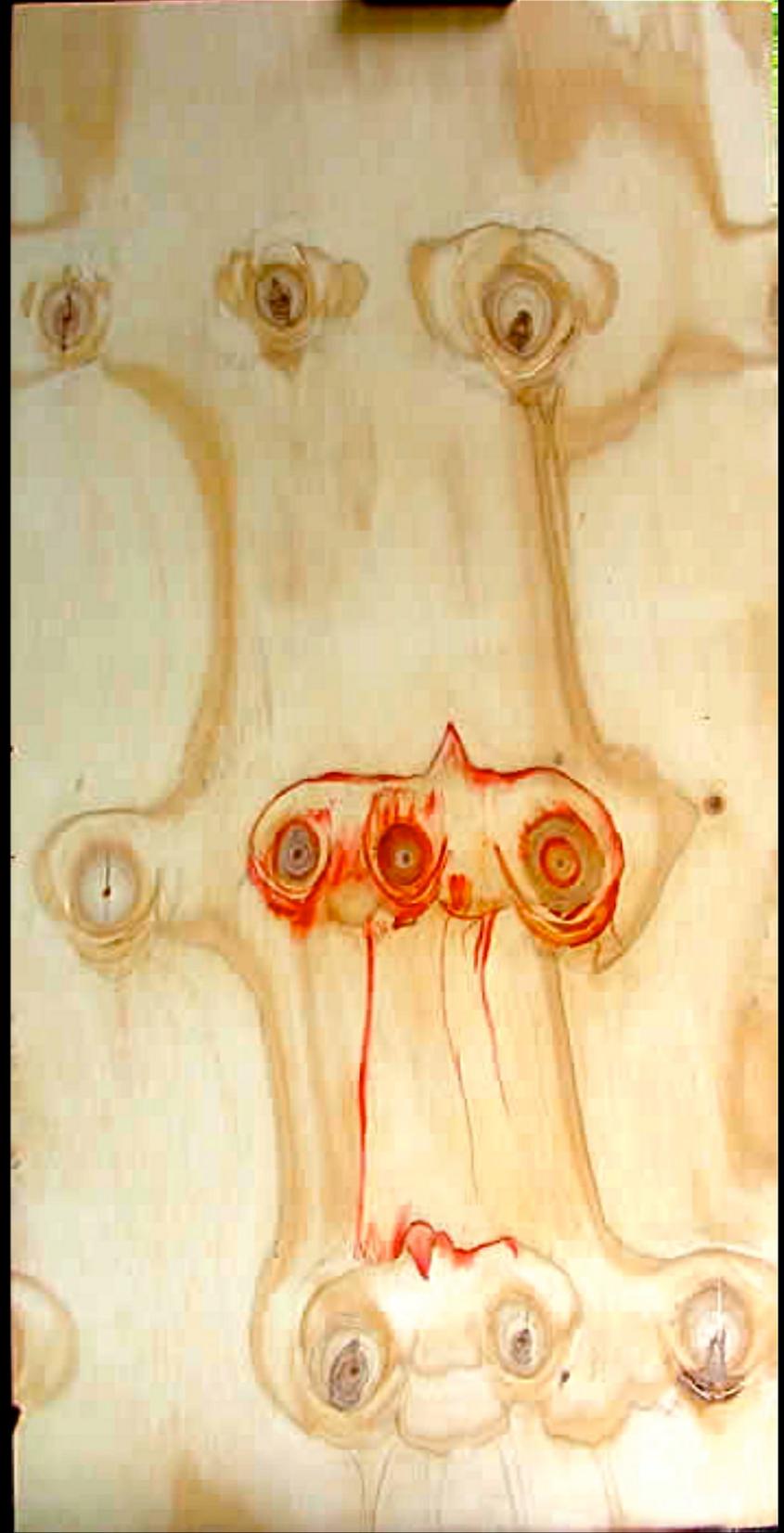
## Before Red was Divided From Blue....

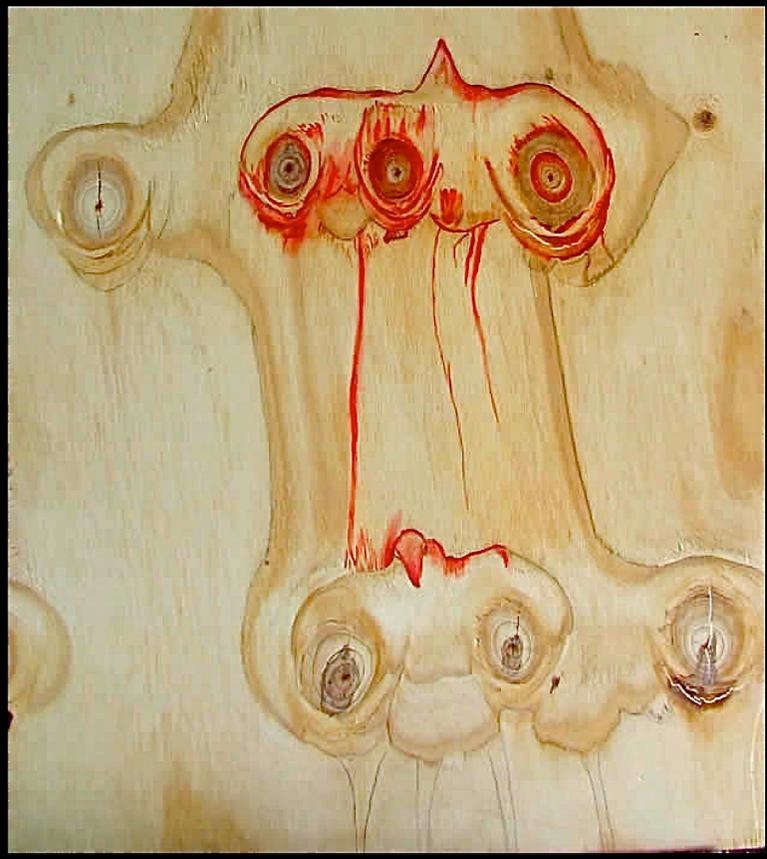
...they were together as Earth and Spirit, Red and Blue were one, before they were divided, and came apart and became.... "Blue Roads ~ Answering Prayers" and "Red Roads ~ Protection" and they needed each other. Red needed the protection that Blue gave Red and Blue needed to help Red on Red's Earth walk. How the story manifests after Creation is part instinctual, part intuitiveness and part trust of Self.

"I believe, in order to see, rather than see in order to believe" as Fool's Crow would say. It becomes Ceremony when something physical occurs to manifest a new understanding. A new truth in ritual. It becomes sacred with prayer.

The Red Road teaching is a Sioux teaching that relates to life lessons as we live out each day from East sunup to West sundown. Red relates to Earth as Blue relates to Sky and the spiritual message which transverses North and South. Being on the Red Road means to be on your path and going in the right direction.

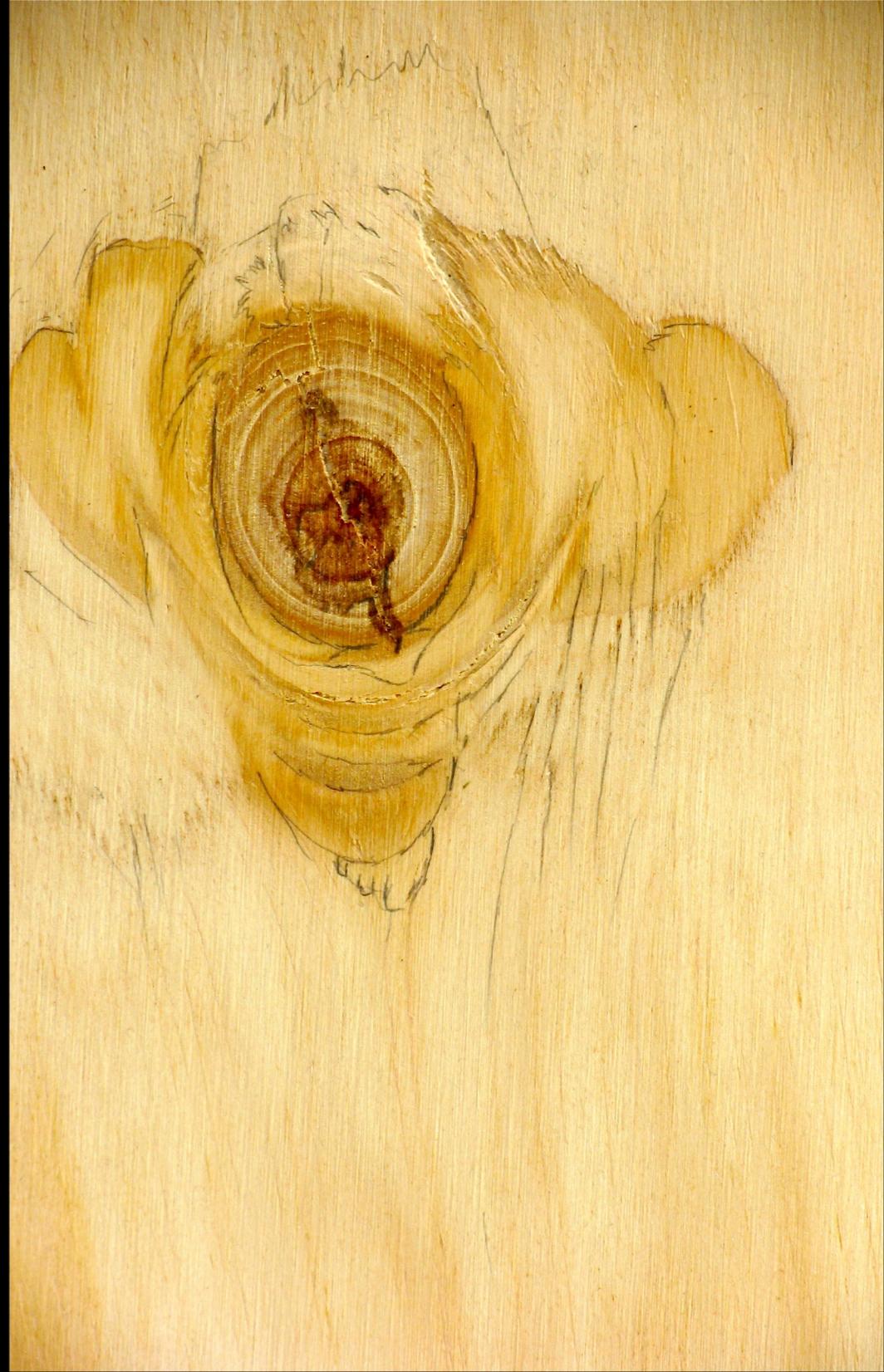
The life of the tree and the knots take on a new life when what they grew is redrawn by my hand, with deep respect, empowering their life with a voice, by acknowledging their spirit, their extensions of life in their branches, they leave knots replacing what they once reached for in light for leaf, from where their branches sprouted, like children of experiences or points of departure, like our life which grows off of us; our children, our creations, our experiences, these are our ceremony of life, that we take for granted every single day we get up doing over and over again forgetting these gifts and opportunities... And so .....





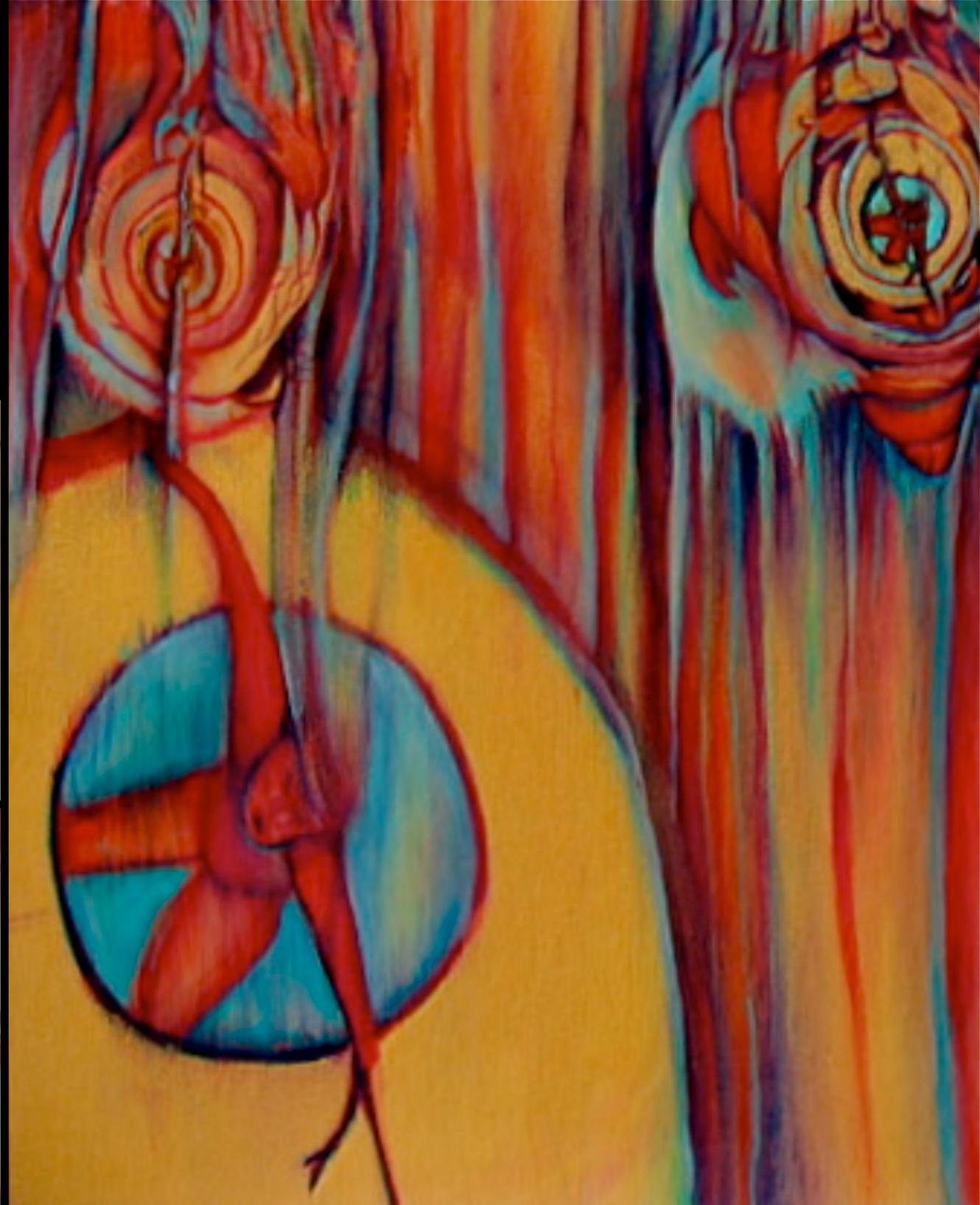
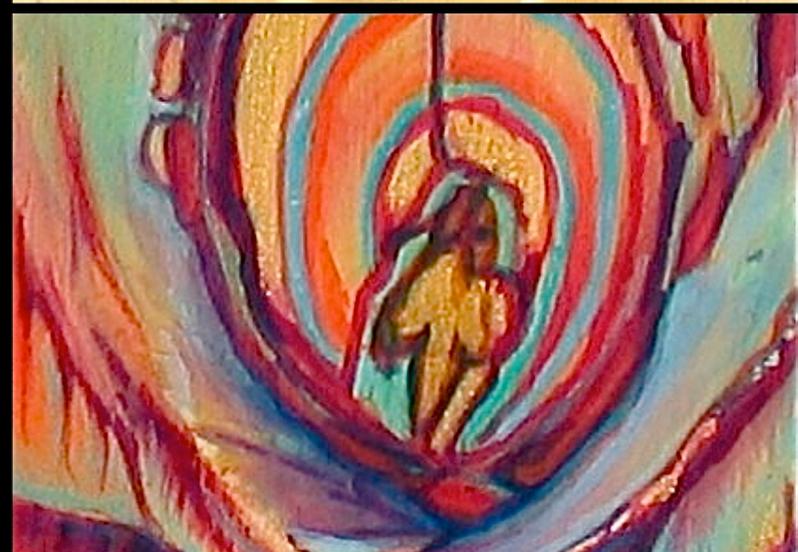
## Blue Roads and Red Roads

Left, the raw wood in two parts, divided. Far Left: the knots appeared like seeing overhead watching people walking and on top of their heads (knots) were images. These reminded me of the view God, our Creator would have and the thought occurred to me that those images in their heads were thoughts and further, that they were ancestors passing back over to answer prayers. They are walking South, down to Earth, reminding me of the Grand Entry at the powwow as the Elders and Veterans lead. This one would be titled "Blue Roads ~ Answering Prayers". The middle left was the bottom to this and became "Red Roads ~ Protection" as the answered prayers for protection of the places of Creation. Right: Detail of Blue Roads shows a close up of the prayer inside Ancestor's head. This image looked like a person stretching their arms to the North Spirit realm and to the South, the Earth where we grow from and this prayer seemed like a prayer for more Spirituality connected to humans to protect Creation. Ancestor passes back over to answer a prayer that only the Creator can see on top of his head, to connect the earth to the spirit realm.



In "BLUE ROADS ANSWERING PRAYERS"

This knot/thought became a prayer for our youth and becomes the image below, by what I see into paint, looking down on and into Ancestor's thoughts, for he is answering that prayer from the Red Road and becomes the image on lower right, reinterpreted.





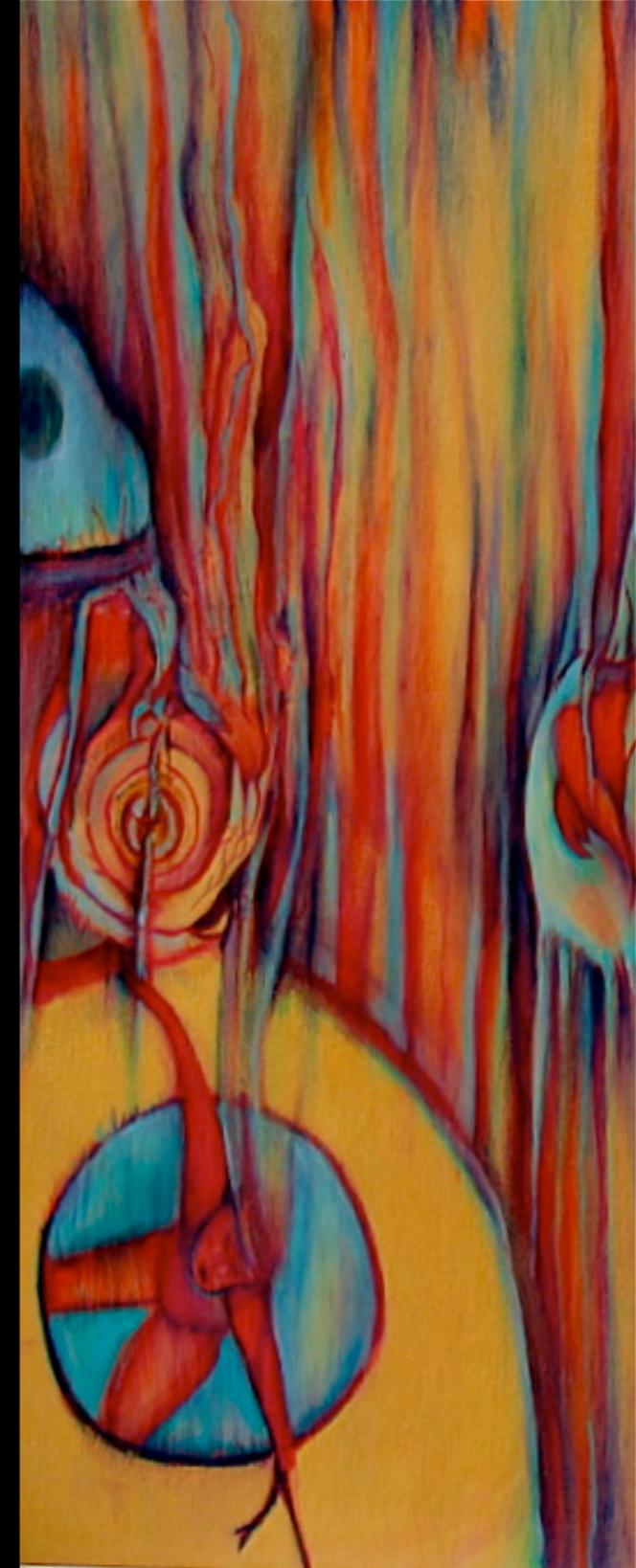
## Blue Roads Answering Prayers

Looking straight onto Eagle's left blue eye; represents night, setting sun to the West, right is yellow; represents day, morning sun to the East. Eagle carries our prayers to the Creator as our life consists of days of need. Creator sends our ancestors to help us on our Red road Earth walk; Footsteps mark their coming from the North to South on their Blue Road Spirit Walk. We are looking ovetop of the Ancestors heads. They carry the Prayers, Eagle brought which I sent, seeing in my prayerful painting. They are heading South to Earth to bring Answers. Their heads hold the prayers, walking like the Grand Entry back to Earth. The Prayer on the right represents our Youth and saving their lives, surrounded by the blue sky of hope.

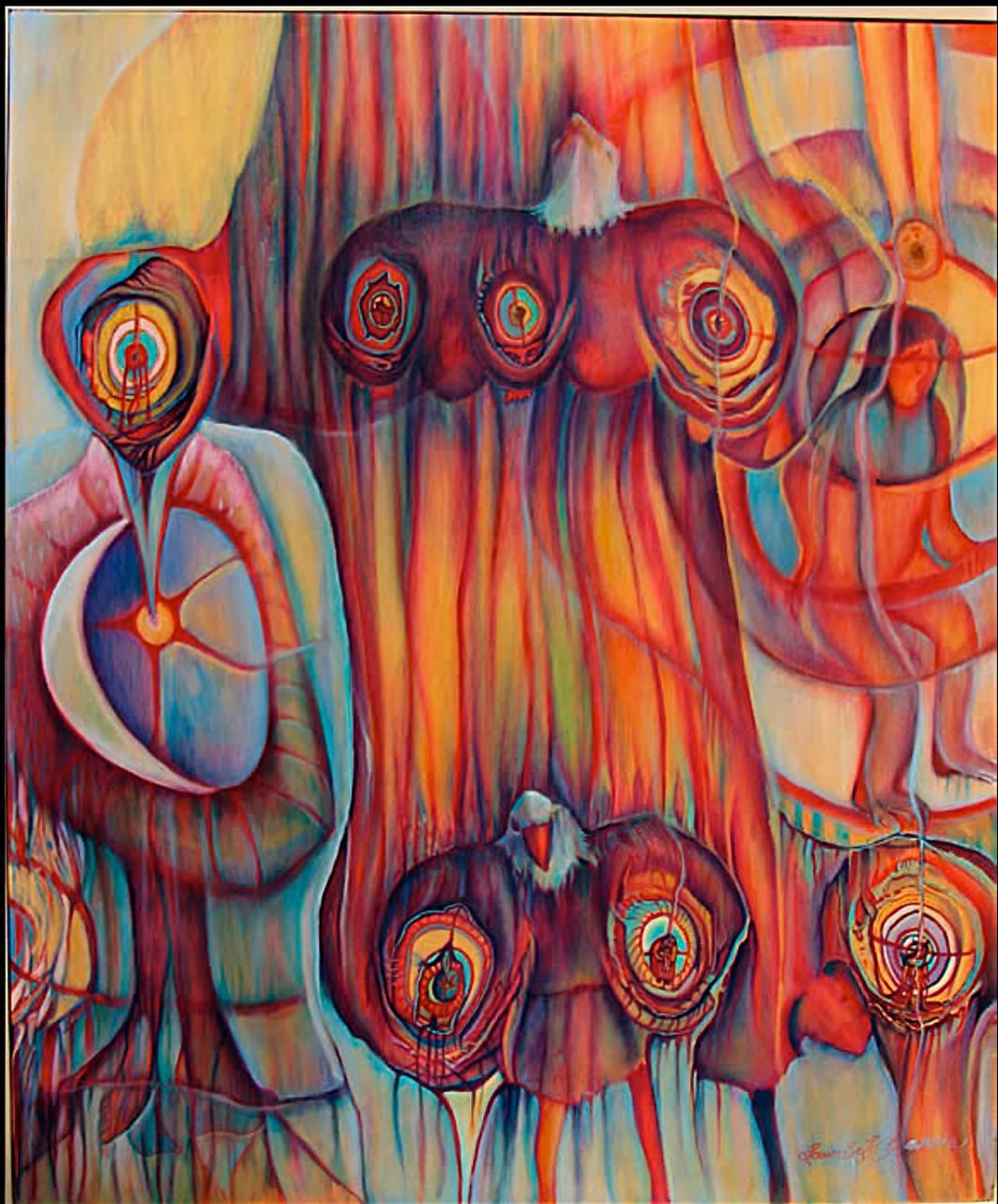
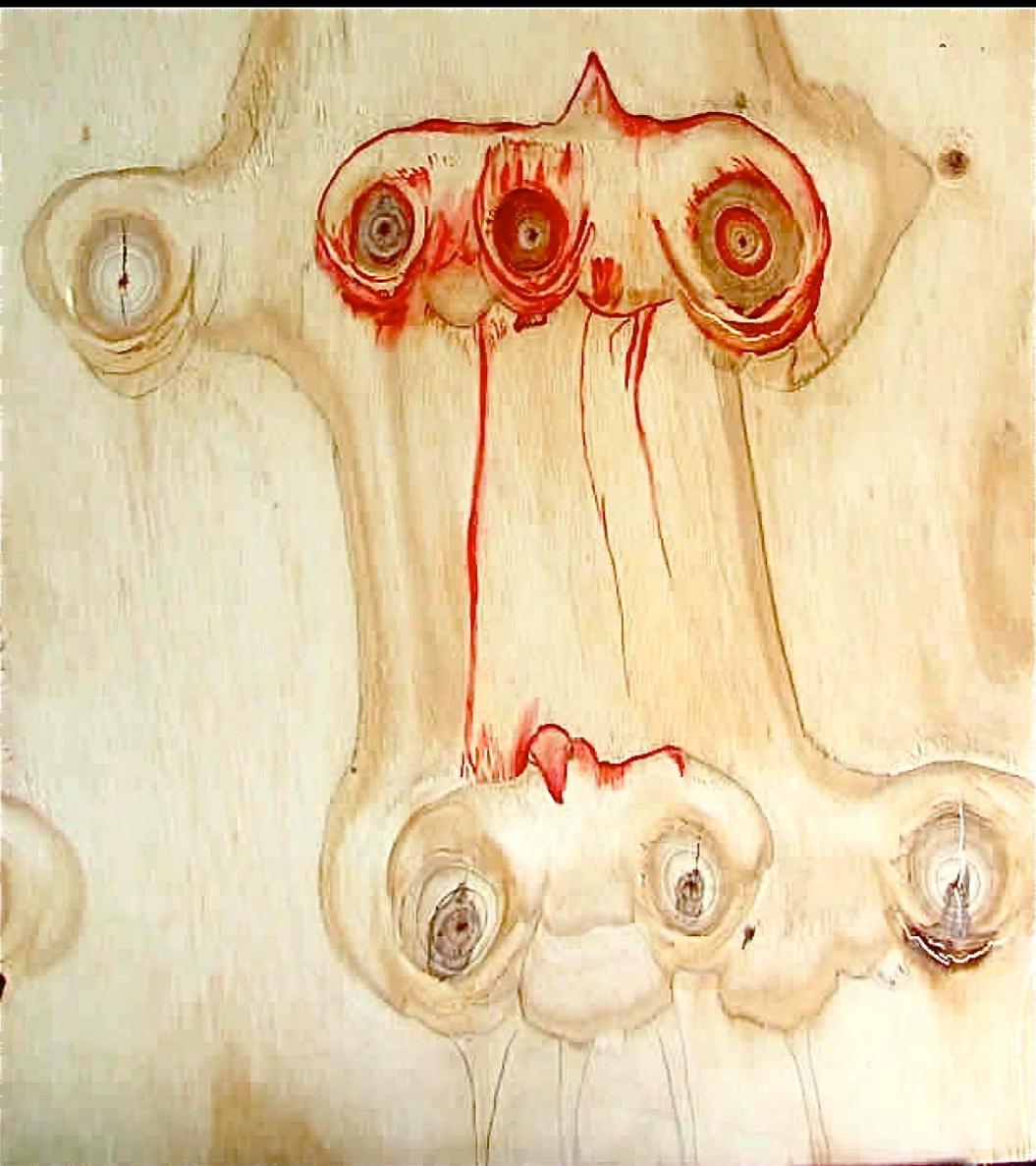
The knot or prayer on the left Ancestors head represents, the spirit connection needed for people living on Earth, reaching in two directions for connection, representative of being rooted on Earth but reaching for Spirit and the prayer for Life Continuance in spiritual connection.

And it is redrawn in Eagles mouth on the lower left in the circle of blue spirit surrounded in East's gold, as he holds the messages of prayers from us, from me, that I recreated from what grew in the earth and branched to the heavens. It is a Ceremonial Prayer for our Indigenous Youth to have hope to live and for our Earth Humans to have Spirituality in their lives again to heal the earth.

Ceremoniously dividing the Red from the Blue  
The Earth from the Spirit and then by rejoining and re-creating Creation with what grew interpreted from my subconscious I am bringing a ceremonial honouring to its life in the form of a prayer and recreating this collaboration of life for life and her inhabitants to continue.







# Red Roads ~ Protection

Red Roads ~ Protection, part of the same piece of ply in its raw state, (far left), became this one, near left. And each of the 3 knots carried special meaning (L to R) 1: For Protection of Mother Earth, 2: For the Dual Sides of Life that bring day and night, the old and the young, male and female; that connection needed for wholeness. 3: For Protection Indigenous Culture and Protection of the Creators who manifest their work into the Universe.

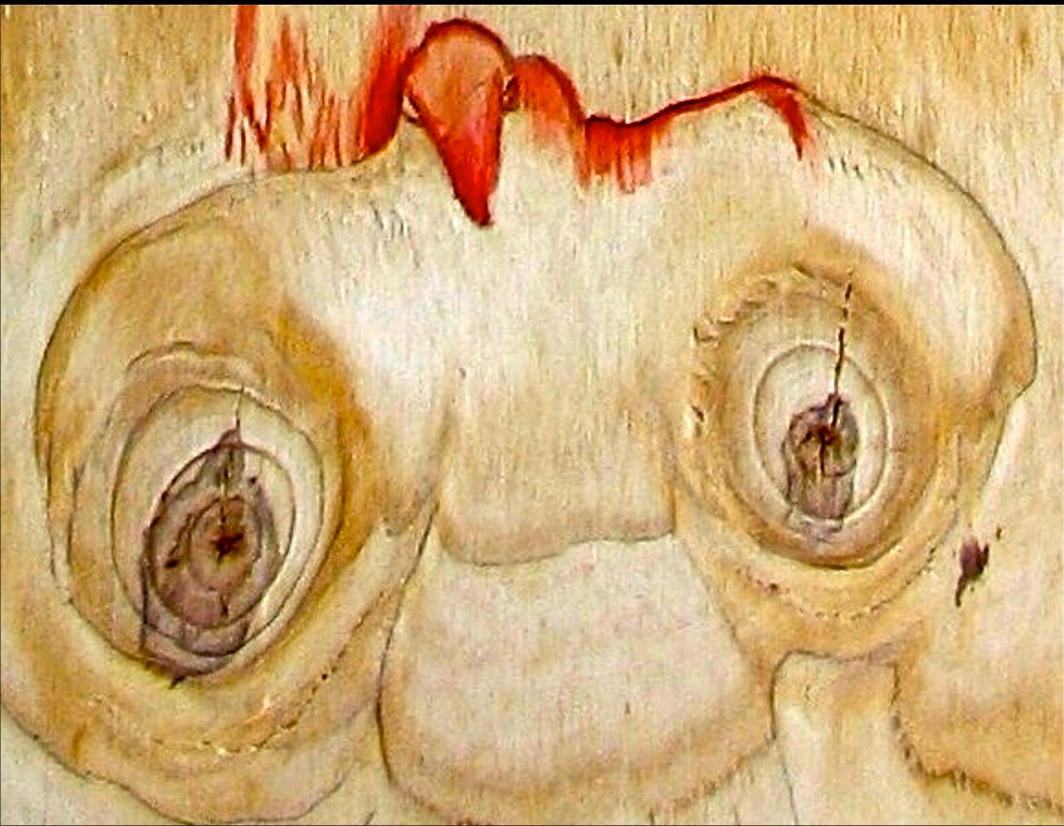
Mother Earth raw (top right), represents, painted (right centre) and recreated (right bottom). Recreating what mother earth created in a knot feels like I am honouring her, our collaboration in thought and prayer into the universe. This knot carried special meaning as it represented Mother Earth on Turtle back, she represents the rooted connection to the Earth and to Spirit.

The knot began in creation as a branch, cut off and exposing its journey, its meaning, which I interpret redrawn; she is a woman, on the back of turtle holding a shield representing the day and night, her shield is the Sun and Moon. The segments dividing around her body represent the segments on turtle's back as months to a year and represent the seasons, she is connected to the Universe in her feet and the earth by her roots. She is recreated seen in the larger redrawn version to the left but also seen in the detail of her head in the lower right frame. Her head here was a knot, which I saw as a sacred seed and its rooting, in eagle's talon. I redrew her body below her head/seed/knot from that initial knot (top right). Recreating from both the tree's and my creation, I see in her turning feet the connection to Universe, but also her rootedness to the earth, for she is both rooted of the Earth spinning in the Universe (L). Her head (lower right) was existing as a knot and I recreated her body from the knot (upper right), as an expression to what she created from her original life in that knot, that branch left a memory of its projection. Lower right, is a closeup of Mother Earth's Head protected in the Clasp of Eagle talon. Inside her Head she retains the Seed of life and the four roots. The seed is within the blue of sky and spirit, within the circle of white universe, within the gold circle of sun, and connected to her hair as it grows on mother earth as her trees covering her skin, her life, the rocks, and the water's which run all through her; her beautiful life called earth.



## Details of: Red Roads Protection

Under Eagles wings are Shields, Protected both by Eagle and as a Shields, L. TOP frames, represents the Elder Carrying tradition back to the Young. Grandmother is situated in the Centre of all the Directions, and she is connected to the North because of her age and wisdom. She carries her knowledge forward for her grandchild's future. The L. two centre frames of the dancer knot represents protection of our Culture within the hoop, the Hoop Dancer Dances for the Earth within the Protection of Shield connected to the Creative Hand of Man/Woman. Right page, he is shown redrawn within the hoops of life out into the Universe, Continuing Culture and Art. Bottom frames, Eagle carries two shields, protecting Mother Earth's Creation and the Indigenous Culture which are connected to each other in the perpetuation of each other. Eagle stands on the four roots of the four races needing each one for support.





## Red Roads Protection - detail

Here all four knots in a line,

"The Red Roads of Mother Earth  
Are on the back of Turtle  
Are played out in the dual sides of  
her life

And nurtured within the Creative  
hand of Man

These are the Sacred places of  
meaning

Which kept human respect as Earth's  
protection

These are shields which protect  
Spirit

The spirit of Turtle Island, the spirit of  
Duality

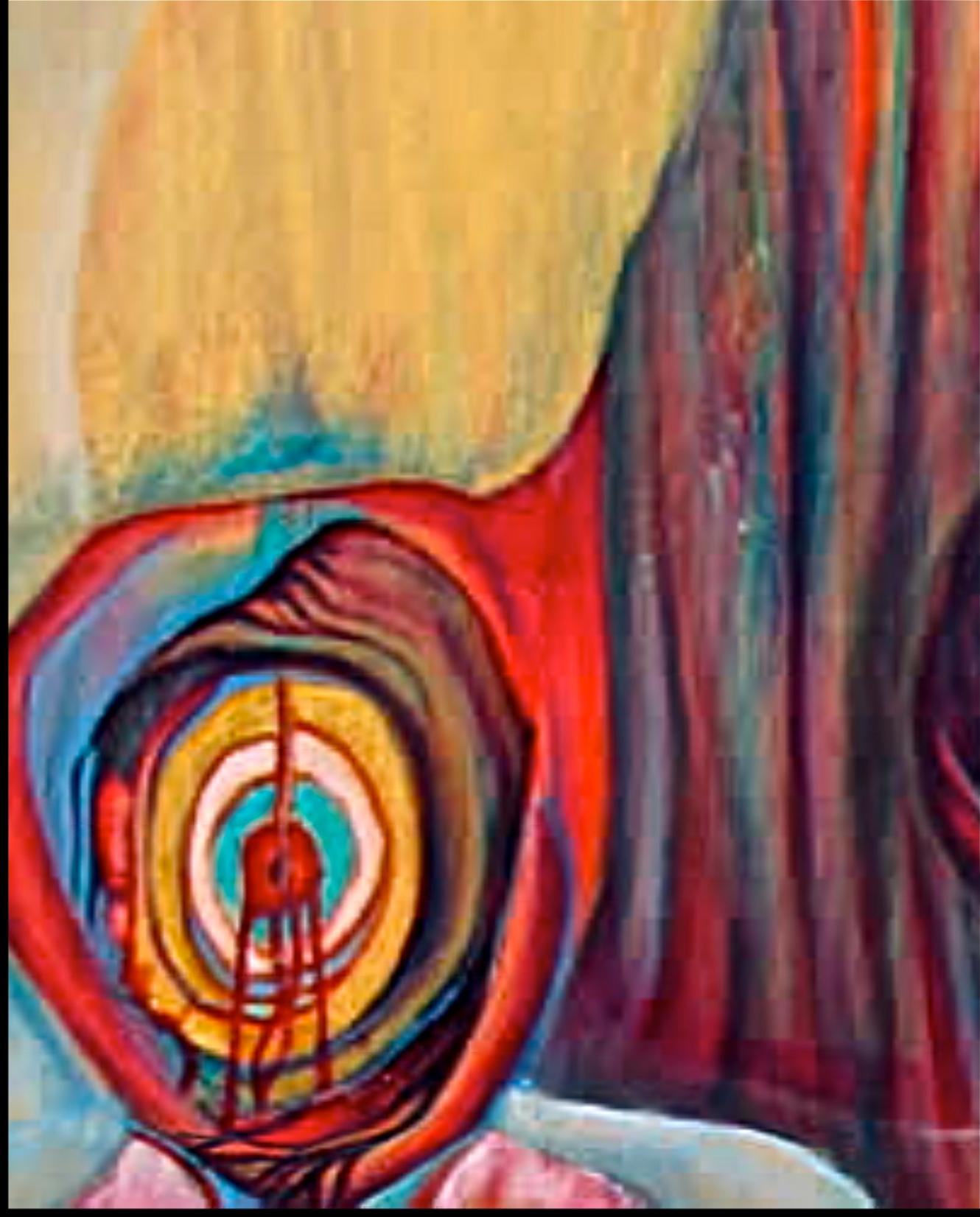
And the Spirit of Creative hand of  
man

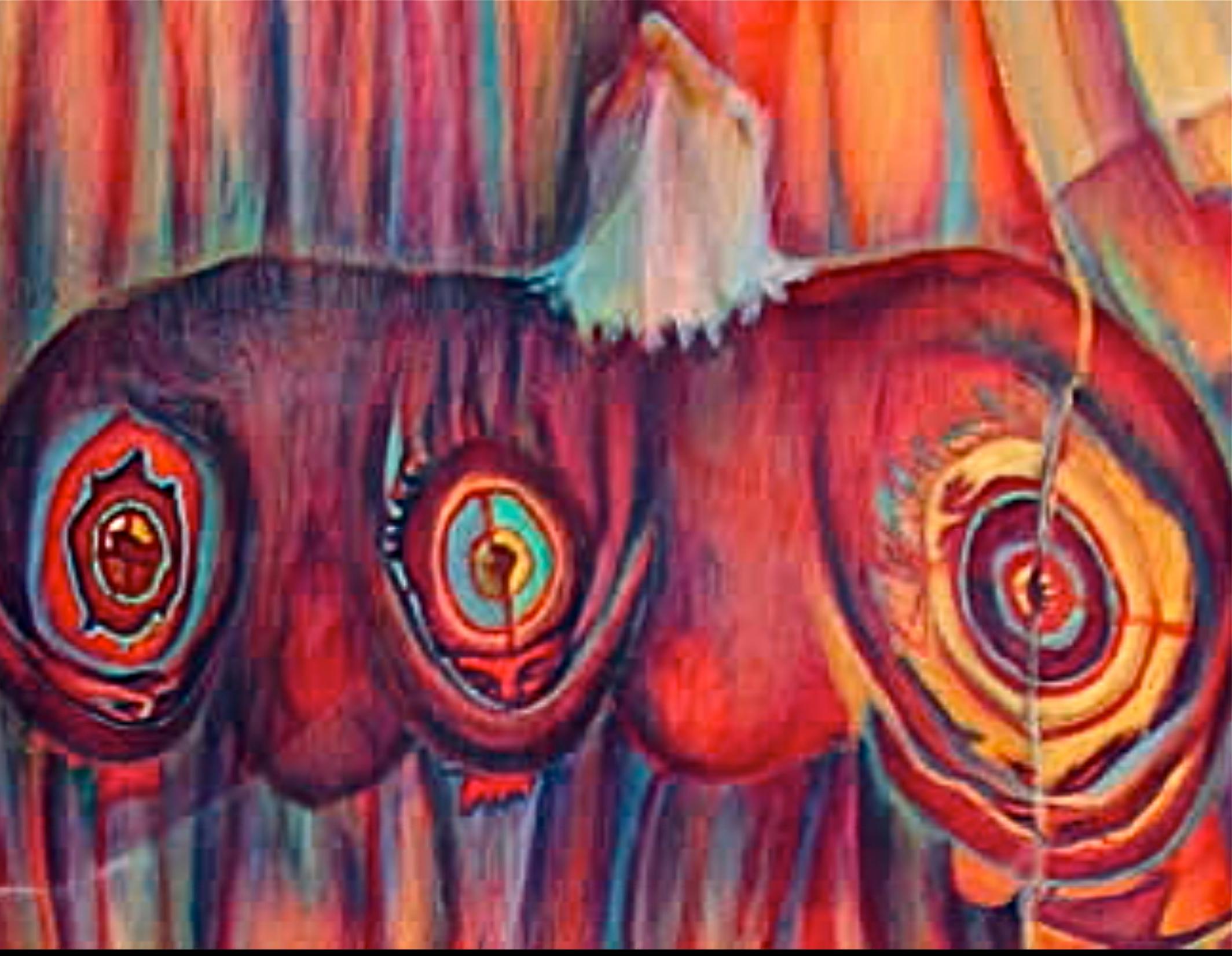
Are connected to each other  
And protected under Eagle's wing"

Linked together via protection for  
survival, by prayer:

connected

by the Spirit of Cycles, streams of  
Light within the Universe







# Blue Roads Answering Prayers

They cross back over, a Grand Entry  
Down the Blue Road ancestors come  
To answer Prayers connected by blood  
To the ones Rooted on Earth  
Who reach along their way  
In a world who see only what is lit.

The bright does distract the heart  
From knowing where truth lives  
And when a body ceases to live  
The shadow leaves a message  
Of its disguise  
These are visceral truths  
That pale at the knowledge  
That lives within  
But dies alone  
When we don't allow its breath  
Or open up to what we were born with. How  
can we know what our tears don't  
As they fall in silent spills  
That we might never know the loss  
Of what created them  
But it is those tears that prayers are built  
The sacrifice of losing water  
From the pools reflecting our souls  
The place where we see the world  
Fall forever from what our heart made inside

It is seeing with Eagles vision  
That prayers sent in this same way  
That a connection is made. I have spent the  
night praying for the morn  
That those young ones live beyond another  
storm  
For I have known my life in spills  
But I have not clear-cut my life for what was  
felled  
Only that I might learn from the cut  
That quells my left side  
And subdues the beating in my heart  
For what would I do  
If I couldn't reach for the Blue  
From my rooted Red Earth  
If I found my self alone  
Without the link to the North  
And have nowhere to pour out this hurt  
Like tears that rupture from surrendered  
visions ....So I pray  
And Spirit Messenger  
Glides into the Blue within the circle watching  
Cuts to where Blue meets Red  
Connects the heart's name  
To the Great Mystery  
And so they come  
They come answering prayers

That my heart spends in drops and tears  
That I spend in years earning. Overhead, He  
is watching  
Watching them enter  
Down that Blue way  
And knows, each quest  
For they bear their meaning  
Where only He can see it  
In their mind's eye  
For the meaning of their descent  
Must bode well for all. A Night turns to a Day  
The black marks the ending  
And the yellow of a splashy start  
Speaks to believing and being hopeful  
To never break that circle of its giving  
For each day is the gift of the propitious sun  
And each night the tool for the dreamer  
And what should never happen  
From our red road rising  
As we stumble along our way  
And yet is still surprising  
We forget the everlasting Blue  
When clouds get in our way  
That prayers are sent so that we continue  
And connect to last out our days  
Looking up to the Blue roads rising.



# Red Road ~ Protection

The Red Roads of Mother Earth are on the back of Turtle, are played out in the dual sides of her life, and nurtured within the Creation hand of Man. These are the Sacred places of meaning, which kept human respect as Earth's protection. These are shields which protect Spirit. The spirit of Turtle Island, the spirit of Duality, and the Spirit of Creative hand of man are connected to each other and protected under Eagles wing. But in the last age, they are bigger and more complex. Mother Earth is bound to Father Sun and her protection is wearing thin, living precariously in the grip of his heat, as she dances her turn, with Grandmother moon circling. Her Seasons change and her roots grow, but things are not as gentle as they once were....

....The Universe has changed and now  
She hangs by Eagle's Talon. The two sides  
of life have changed  
It is more than a day and a night  
More than shadow and the light  
More than a dividing seedling  
More than the physical and the spiritual  
Or the Red and the Blue Roads meeting  
It is a shield of Young and Old connecting  
After breaking apart so many years ago  
The linking of Culture back into family  
Into the Creative Hand of man  
Becomes a Red Road that protects Turtle  
The Creative Hand Shield had grown  
Continued from the original ones  
Which began in the oneness of human  
beings  
In the great hoop of peace with the Mind  
Where the hoops of the eyes saw stories  
And created visions in the intellect  
Where the hoop of the mouth had songs  
For the ears of the Sacred Ones  
Where the hoop of the hand had Creations  
Spawning another world of beauty  
In paint and carving, bead and quill to see  
and touch  
And take into the mind another story another

song  
Sewing meaning into the heart  
Where the Hoop of the feet came the Dance  
And balance on a Buffalo was all  
Known in the four ages as the four legs of life  
With the responsibility of each step  
Came the dance within the hoop of life  
To see that all of these each one continue  
Saw the many Hoops of Creations  
Clasped in Eagle's other talon  
And this Dance of Creation was different  
From Mother Earth's original dance on  
Turtle's Back For this one was created  
To mend what was broken  
And to teach what could not be spoken  
Through Creations of the hand  
Through the Duality of Life  
Each Shield is related to the other one  
Where the young are related to Creation  
Through their age  
And the old are connected to Creation  
Through their culture  
And the Young are connected to Creation  
Through their hand  
And the old are linked to Creation  
Through the land  
And Creation is linked together

Through the spirit that unites hand to land  
For Turtle to continue and mend and heal  
She is dependant on the duality of life  
Where the young must connect to the old  
To learn the teachings of Turtle's heart  
For the teachings to connect to the next  
heart beat  
Where respect for all Life is learned  
And living healthy is earned  
The teachings are dependant on the artists  
To translate them into images  
As a universal tongue that all can understand  
And render into hearts and evolve into minds  
Remembering when the first hoop of love  
Was broken so long ago  
The one of the human heart. The duality of  
life has given us two hands  
The Creative hand can mend the hoop of the  
world  
As all know what the other hand of man has  
done  
And it is staying on the Red Road  
Where we can join the hoop as one

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