

Chippewa artist paints the STORY OF A PEOPLE

BY MATT NAGLE
For Tribal News

What is extraordinary about David W. Craig's artwork is the range of emotions that come through in his paintings. Each piece stands completely on its own, each one emoting a feeling that welcomes viewers in. Those who take time to let the images speak will be drawn into the artist's vision of Indians running free and being free as the creator intended for them. His art tells the story of a people full of life in a world where all living things are connected through an ageless and omnipotent great spirit.

"For me to paint the Indian is not just a matter of recreating beadwork and feathers," David W. Craig said. "I show the people as I know them. We cry, rejoice - all the connections that make us human - and to show the spiritual essence of a people. Our spirituality is thousands and thousands of years old yet it has survived against great odds to stamp it all out. It's coming back, and part of it is through art."

The collection of David W. Craig's art now on view at Lakewood Gallery and Framing Company takes viewers on a journey into what lies beyond what the eye can see as told through Native legends and lore. "Everything is a teacher," David W. Craig said. "All the elements are teachers and guides for us. Everything is connected."

"This isn't a strictly Indian thing, it's a human thing. And it's not even just a human thing; we are related to the four-leggeds, the winged ones, the ones that swim and crawl.

We are all related to all the plant nations, everything. The way I'm telling that story is through my eyes and what I see and understand."

Through colors and symbols David W. Craig illustrates childhood innocence to innocence lost. "Grandma's Gift" is an adorable four-by-six-inch painting of an Indian doll with a big smile on her face full of joy. The fringes of her buckskin sleeves hang from her outstretched arms as if she wants a big hug. "Wambli Wi'easa Takes Flight" is a striking painting of a child wearing a bear claw necklace, eagle feathers on her shoulder and a mane of horsehair flowing down her back. Her face is in profile; her eyes look to the west suggesting the yet to be discovered future that lies before her. A fully mature eagle flies next to her, guiding her on her path. Behind her a juvenile eagle looks to the east, surveying where the girl has been. She is growing into womanhood protected by the eagle spirit.

The harsher realities of Indian life are explored in David W. Craig's art as well. "Are You Listening?" is a moving painting of a tribal elder with two large eagle feathers tied in his hair, suggesting that he has great wisdom. His face is lined with age, his tired eyes distant as if he is lost in thought over what has passed. The title asks a profound question that, through contemplation, could bring a tear to the eye of the viewer who is savvy to the hardships placed upon the shoulders of Indian people.

In "Whispers" David W. Craig shows a lone tee-pee with a buffalo painted on it



Wambli Wi'easa Takes Flight

standing at the grassy edge of a forest under a dramatic purple sky. The campsite is deserted and looks quiet and still; the buffalo and the people have all gone away.

David W. Craig incorporates numerous types of media in his artwork. His paintings on clear acrylic blocks are delightfully unique and well done. He paints the images in reverse on the backside of the block so that the finished work must be viewed through the thick, clear

plexiglass. In these pieces he includes mixed media such as rice paper and gold threads in the backgrounds.

David W. Craig's sculptural pieces are equally engrossing. The artist uses thin sheets of deerskin from which he forms small and realistic human faces that protrude outward. He decorates the images with turquoise, feathers, horsehair and other natural items. He is also a drum maker. His "9 to 5" job is that of a framer for Lakewood Gallery, at which he is quite talented. The frames he made for his

own works compliment the art exquisitely.

David W. Craig, an enrolled Chippewa of the Little Shell Band, was born in Enumclaw and raised in the Puyallup area but his roots are purely rural. As a young man growing up, he spent considerable time among his father's family on the Flathead Reservation in western Montana. His dad was killed in a car accident when Craig was four years old, yet he held on to his father's legacy. His adoptive mother, Lakota Sioux of the Black Bear Family in South Dakota, also had a big influence on him. She was a traditional Lakota woman, David W. Craig said, a Sun Dancer and fluent in her language, which she passed down to David W. Craig as he has to his two young daughters.

In many of his paintings David W. Craig includes the moon as a remembrance of a gift from his grandfather. "I almost always put a moon in the piece as a reminder to myself of

many things," David W. Craig said. "When my grandfather was dying - I was with him when he passed away and he taught me many, many things - he said, 'always look at the full moon. I'll be just beyond the moon. That's where I'm at and I'll be waiting for you there.'

There is no beginning and no end to that sacred circle of life. When putting the moon in, to me that's my signature, and where I put it in the painting has significance.

"I hope that my art would encourage people to become more aware of their own ecological and spiritual heritage no matter what walk of life you come from," he remarked.

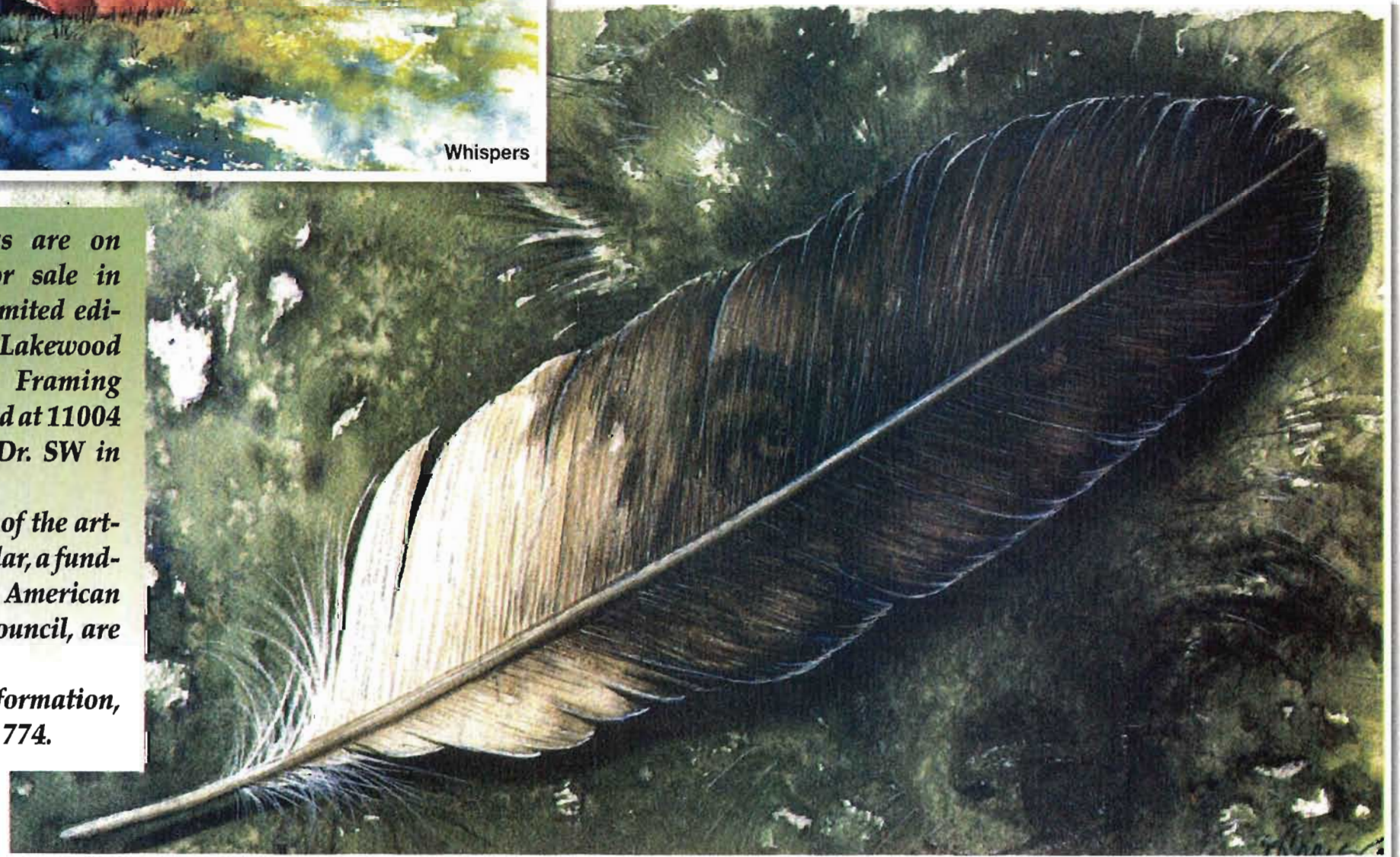
"Just because we once weren't allowed to speak our language and wear our moccasins in school and had to cut our hair, we didn't lose everything. Even today so many people look at Indian culture and say, well, it's all selling cigarettes and casinos. That's not the way it is at all."



Whispers



Craig



Craig's works are on display and for sale in originals and limited edition prints at Lakewood Gallery and Framing Company located at 11004 Gravelly Lake Dr. SW in Lakewood.

Signed copies of the artist's 2008 calendar, a fundraiser for the American Indian Relief Council, are also for sale.

For more information, call (253) 584-1774.