

# KUDOS

Good Life

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## Shakin' up Sedona with Shakespeare



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◆ Feature ◆

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## Bearcloud Putting stories on canvas

Story and photos by Helga Freund

*The earth and sky came together as one. The spirits gifted the sacred waters of earth, as they gifted the sacred water of the sky. I walked the earth and journeyed the stairs of understanding.*  
The story of "Wah-Sha-Shu"

So begins the story behind Rod "Bearcloud" Berry's latest work, titled "Wah-Sha-Shu", an oil painting of grand proportions, depicting a majestic evening mountain scene in the High Sierras. The sky is a mass of moonlit clouds, highlighting a waterfall teeming from the crags. It is a work of

contrasts: light and dark, earth and sky, intensity and serenity that engages the viewer completely.

The stories told by Berry's paintings may also be a reflection of the artist's own journey. He believes that his painting is a reflection of spirit, and that

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Contributed image  
A painting by Bearcloud titled, "As Above As Below." Part of its story goes, "As I stand upon the Earthmother I feel the Strength of the Eaglespirit at my side. The old ones gather in the mountains of truth bringing their messages of the Great Mystery and there are visions of harmony between the Earth and Sky." This is also the painting he donated for auction at the Red Rock Fine Art & Wine Festival.



Bearcloud in front of his latest painting, "Wah-Sha-Shu," or Eagle Walk Water Journey. The oil on canvas measures approximately 4 1/2" by 5 1/2" and took a year to complete.

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"each one of us has the ability to discover that feeling within himself." He hopes that viewers will take the time to let the spirit of his paintings reach them, and in return, help them to find their own spirituality.

Deeply influenced by his Wah-sha-shu (more commonly known as Osage) heritage, and by visions that come to him through the sacred pipe and other ceremonies, Bearcloud's paintings evolve slowly as the story and images reveal themselves to him. He often works for an entire year on a single canvas.

His majestic landscapes are reminiscent of the 19th century Hudson River School of Painting, where artists extolled the glories of nature, influenced by first-hand experiences and reports from expeditions of the grandeur of America's



Rod "Bearcloud" Berry at home in the idyllic setting of Oak Creek Canyon.

untamed West. And indeed, two artists from this period, Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt, had an enormous influence on his work.

Bearcloud grew up in Amarillo, Texas, "with a paintbrush in hand." He was constantly getting into trouble with his teachers for "doodling" instead of paying attention to lessons, and he would draw just about everything, though he favored portraits and animals.

At the age of 16, he walked into an art supply store in Amarillo, and there, for the first time, found himself facing a landscape by Thomas Moran, on loan.

"It was a huge work, measuring something like 10 feet by 12 feet," says Bearcloud, "and it literally took my breath away. The luminosity of the colors, the magnificence of the scene, the reverence for nature, I knew immediately, that painting would be my life, my way

of trying to capture the spirit of earth and sky."

Bearcloud began collecting pictures of the West's grand scenic places - Yellowstone, Yosemite, and his favorite, Monument Valley, longing to see them in person. At the same time, he assiduously studied the works by the great 19th American landscape painters, who, he claims, were his best teachers.

He also studied and was indoctrinated into the ways of his forefathers, learning and participating in its sacred rituals. When the opportunity arose, he traveled to many of the places that he had known only through photographs. He eventually settled in Columbia, California, where he opened a studio/gallery on the Mi-wok Indian reservation, spending much time gathering his spiritual forces on the nearby peaks of the Sierras.

However, with little traffic

and limited opportunity to sell his work from his location on the Mi-wok reservation, Bearcloud began to think about settling elsewhere.

"With the Indian way, things come to you as you need them," he says philosophically.

He headed out to explore other areas, doing art shows on the way, covering southern California, then a stint at the World Trade Center in Dallas, and from there to Taos, Santa Fe, Scottsdale and eventually Sedona. Coming upon Tlaquepaque, he knew immediately it was the right setting for his gallery. He was fortunate to get a small upstairs space for a gallery there, and since that time, 14 years ago, has called Sedona home.

His studio/home is nestled in the woods of Oak Creek Canyon, an ideal setting for work and contemplation, while the Bearcloud Gallery remains in

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Tlaquepaque, now in a larger ground-floor location.

But you'd be hard pressed to purchase a Bearcloud painting - they're not for sale.

Says Bearcloud, "How do I put a value on a painting that took me a year to complete?" Instead, his work is available in the form of high quality, signed, limited edition prints, imaginatively matted and framed. The mats themselves are works of art, individually hand-painted by Bearcloud to accentuate each framed image. There is also a series of giclée reproductions, which come as close to the vibrancy of the original paintings as one can get. The original painting is scanned with all the exact nuances of color and tone, then digitally sprayed with ink on canvas. These too, are in limited editions, signed and numbered on the back.

Each depiction, comes with its own "story", and for staff members, Cheryl Rynd and Christy Gardner, being among the gallery's inspiring paintings and beautiful objects and telling the stories behind the



The Bearcloud Gallery in Tlaquepaque features the work of several artists, in addition to that of Rod "Bearcloud" Berry. Here, a majestic landscape by Bearcloud is complemented by Debra Farrell's pit-fired pots.

paintings is what they enjoy most about working there.

In addition to Bearcloud's paintings and prints, the gallery

features work, of other Native American and contemporary artists working in natural materials. Among the other art-

ists represented in the gallery, Debra Farrell's pit fired pots are notable. Born and raised in Arizona, her inspiration and materials come from its forests and deserts. She uses traditional coils and slabs to build the pots, which are first bisque fired for strength, then put into a pit with combustible materials - pine cones and needles, bark, dry leaves, even dung. They are left to smolder for several hours, creating surface colorings and effects. She then begins the process of weaving pine needles and various vines into the pots, and finally, completes the personality of each pot by adorning it with feathers, metals, stones and fossils. Debra takes care that there is interest and beauty from every angle and the total effect is stunning.

For a visual treat, do visit The Bearcloud Gallery. The friendly staff delights in telling the stories behind Bearcloud's work, and are equally knowledgeable about the other artists represented there. Located in Sedona's Tlaquepaque, No. C-107, it's open seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

For details, call (928) 282-4940.