

Information from Marne Zafar about the print by Chholing Taha:

I do have a quote from her about that particular work, Bear Medicine ... Here it is.

*This painting speaks to our current global balance. We have to be fierce in uncovering the truth, fierce in our efforts to improve our spiritual path, and fierce in protecting our children from false ideas. The glory of the true nature of being fierce has nothing to do whatsoever with violence, prejudice, aggression or hatred.*

I also have this article from the writer, Will Fraser that was written a few years ago (saved as I wanted to have info "in my pocket" on Choling ...

*"Most of the pictures come late at night — I can't sleep, I'm lying around thinking about things, and the paintings come to me all done. The hardest part is then to get the drawings out of my brain and on paper."*

Chholing Taha was born in Ontario near the Six Nations Reserve to a Cree mother and who she thinks was likely a Mohawk father, because she spent her earliest years on the reserve among the Mohawk tribe. When she was just 3 years old her mother disappeared, and she was left in a rooming house on the U.S. – Canadian border, soon to be adopted out to a non-Native family. To this day she does not know what happened to her mother. And yet her intense early memories of her mother and the reservation have shaped her entire life and artistry: "I think that for Indigenous people, particularly in America, when they get displaced, and they have a few memories of where they were from, they hang on to them. You're afraid you're gonna forget them, and you just hang on to them really hard."

Taha started drawing when she was a very small child, and as she grew up feeling like she didn't belong in the mainstream world nor quite in the Native world, she feels she always carried within her what she refers to as a special *lens*.

"As Indigenous people we're born with a lens of the land, of your space, of your language, of the air and the plants... They can't take that lens out of you. And even if you end up like a person like myself who is displaced at an early age, the lens is I swear genetic, it is a part of your spirit, it is really in there."

Resolving her two-worlds experience became for her a kind of mission, leading her to get involved in ceremonies like the sun dance, traditional night lodges, fasts and sweats, which helped her to such an extent that without ceremony, she really doesn't know quite where she would've ended up.

“The ceremonies were like a life preserver, and my internal spirit or being or lens recognized that life preserver, and I was able to grab onto it. Being in ceremony, suddenly through that lens you have, all becomes crystal clear.”

Ceremony had such an effect on Taha that she decided she wanted to pursue work that would give people a connection to their own spirit, to explore that invisible self in their life, even if they're not Indigenous. Taha's art explores the spirit of her people just as it seeks to emblemize a universal language.

“The media is so loud, sometimes it's very confusing, and while I think political art is very important, where sometimes you need a loud bang to get people's attention, at this point in my art-making I'm interested in calming people enough to where they can think about things more clearly. You hear the big bang and think, “Ooh, what's that?!” but then you need to calm down so you make better decisions. If I leave a legacy it'll be that I calmed somebody's heart enough to where they can make the best choices that they can make.”

Taha's art strives for us to focus our lenses, just as she focuses her lens through her very practice. Hers is a holistic artistic practice striving to communicate and commune with her own heritage and experience, at the same time encouraging others to find understanding and resonance with their own lived and inherited experience. “Wisdom finally comes when we realize we've all been affected by colonialism,” she sagely remarks. “[Not everyone] thinks they've been affected, but they certainly have, intensely.”

Ultimately, Taha's art emboldens us to align our own lenses so that we might open ourselves up to better understanding our own experience in the world.

“That lens is a foundation. It's interesting when you have your lens functioning well, you can have a connection with your heart's lens, your ancestral lens, you can then start to feel that you know what you need to do, or that you should wait and see. If you really truly feel there is something happening, your lens will magnify that so you can make better decisions.”

- Written by Will Fraser 2020

There was also a great special on her on MNO/TPT (Minnesota Originals). It is on youtube and it is wonderful!! [Link here](#)