

KIRA FERCHO

THE ARTIST'S JOURNEY AT MIDLIFE

by AARON KAMPFE

“Sometimes it takes a medicine man to teach us how to believe in ourselves.”

—Kira Fercho



PAINTING IN THE FIRST, SECOND, & THIRD PERSON

This year, Kira Fercho comfortably turns 40 and settles into midlife. Like many who hit this milestone year, Kira is reflective about the past and also thinking forward about the next phases of her life.

Kira grew up in Montana and was drawn to art at an early age. She started selling paintings in her early teens and had her first gallery show at age 16. In college, she studied art and teaching. She later obtained a master's degree in mental health and rehabilitation and worked as a licensed therapist in Billings. At the age of 31, she left the profession to become a full-time painter.

While most artists don't do many commission pieces until they are in their 50s, Kira started doing commissions around the age of 28. By the time she was 36, she estimates that about 70% of her business was commission work. In 2015, Kira opened her own gallery in Big Sky Town Center. Kira says, "My art career has happened so much faster and has gone so much farther than I thought it ever would. I didn't grow up in an artistic family. My mom was an attorney and my dad had a construction company. I didn't grow up thinking I was going to be an artist but here I am, at age 40, getting to paint and turn my passion into my livelihood. I didn't choose art. Art chose me."

Kira's two daughters are 15 years apart. Her elder daughter is in her first year of college and her younger daughter is in pre-school. Kira says, "During most of my adult life, I will have had children at home—from my early 20s through my 50s. I love having children in the house and love all those stages of growing up. The women in my painting I call my 'Madonnas,' who are mothers and mother figures and represent a role in life I continue to play."

Generally, as artists age, their work gets better. Mid-life and mid-career, Kira contemplates the future, saying, "I look forward to seeing what I paint when I'm 65. Looking ahead in life, I still have so much more living, so much more creating, and so much more growing to do as an artist. Those who have invested in me will continue to see me evolve as a painter."

With a birthday on her mind, Kira pauses to reflect on life and muse upon her past, present, and future. With a confident, understated smile of a Madonna in her prime, she thinks out loud, "What will I paint when I'm 80?"

Like a writer, Kira Fercho chooses a voice with which to create her pieces. Paintings, like literature, can be created in the first, second, or third person.

In some works, Kira is painting herself... as a youthful spirit free from the burdens of adult life; as a mother, a caregiver, and provider for her family; or as a wise elder reflecting on life's journey and contemplating the journey beyond this life. She paints in first person—in the "I" voice.

For commission work, Kira paints for others and tells their stories. She says, "Many of my paintings are commissions and with commissions I get to know the client and where they are on life's journey; what they want from their most intimate space—their home; what speaks to them spiritually and emotionally; and what they want to leave for the next generation. With commission work I paint for you and create a scene that is personal to you." In these scenarios, Kira paints in the second person—in the "you" voice.

In other pieces, Kira paints what she observes in the world around her. Her portraits express people's passions and spirit. Her Impressionistic landscapes capture the feeling of a scene in nature and the movement of light and color. Her Native lodges reflect the heritage of proud peoples and their symbol systems and worldviews. Her horses are wild horses and they run with absolute freedom. Here, she paints in the third person—in the "he," "she," or "they" voice.

MEDICINE MAN (show on the left)

After 11 years of marriage, Kira's parents were still not able to conceive. Western medicine had explanations of why it wouldn't be possible, but Kira's paternal grandmother sent the couple on another path—a spiritual path. The couple visited a Native medicine man and received prayers. Within a month, her mother was pregnant with Kira. Her sister followed within two years.

Although Kira hasn't practiced full time in years, she is a licensed therapist. She says, "I truly believe that we hold answers within our own healing. Sometimes it takes a medicine man to teach us how to believe in ourselves."

ROAM

Wild horses, like those living in the Pryor Mountains, express Kira's wandering nature and appreciation of her life in Montana. They have a freedom to run across open land, through an untamed landscape, and under a big sky. Kira says, "In a sense, wild horses, like children, give us a unique perspective as they are free from social and cultural constructs. We admire their playful nature and spiritual expression and long for that type of freedom."

JOURNEY

In *Journey*, is the warrior coming or going? Is he setting out on an excursion or returning from one? Is he a young man, leaving the comforts of the tipi, or an elderly man, returning home to his family and tribe? *Journey* is all of those scenarios and past, present, and future all at once.

Kira says, "Whether I realize it or not, I always paint from my life experience. As my father aged and was reaching the end of his life, I observed him being retrospective. He shared memories of being a young man who left home and had adventures. At the same time, he recognized that he was an old man who was returning home and letting his family take care of him as he transitioned to the next life."

HEAVEN

The tipi transcends Earth and Sky, touching both this world and the next. Living in Big Sky country, and specifically in eastern Montana, Kira's experience of seeing vast expanses of land framed by large, open skies influences both her artwork and worldview.

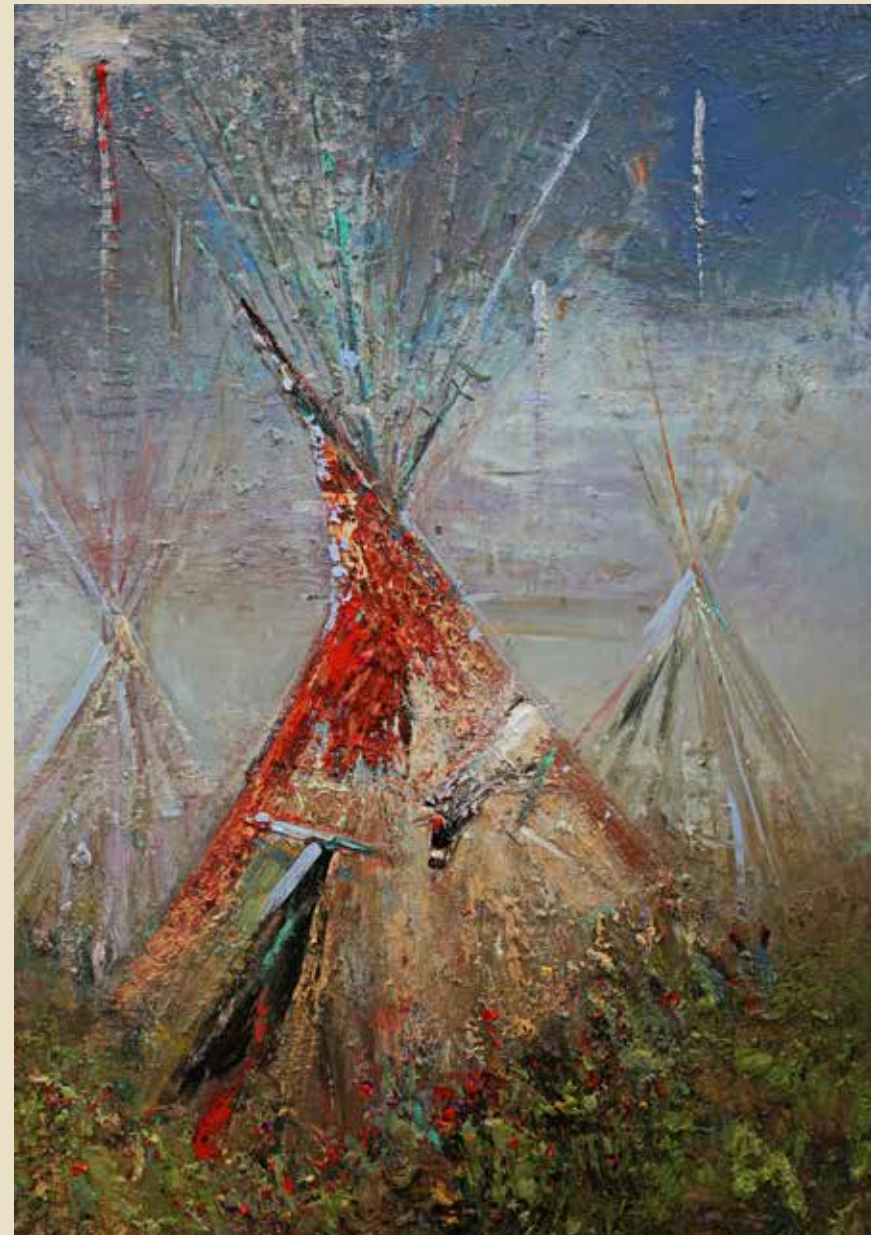
She says, "Metaphorically, what connects these two worlds? Something like observing an eagle flying overhead as I drive my truck down the highway will strike me as in between Earth and Sky, in between our life here and the next life. This tipi connects us here on Earth with our ancestors who live above and reminds us that we have a little bit of heaven right here on Earth."



Roam | Oil on canvas | 2' x 4'

Heaven | Oil on canvas | 44" x 62"

Journey | Oil on canvas | 40" x 40"



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I always paint from
my life experience."*

—Kira Fercho



Riders | Oil on canvas | 5' x 4'

RIDERS

Over 100 years ago, CM Russell's paintings captured the High Plains landscapes with their plateaus, rivers, sweeping prairies, colorful vistas, native animals, and scattered peoples. A native of eastern Montana, Kira too is enthralled with the high plains. She says, "Everyone loves the mountains of the West, but not everyone gets to really experience and appreciate the prairies and badlands. From my perspective, as someone who grew up in this environment, the High Plains have equal grandeur and dramatic beauty and maybe even more gradation in color—so much material to work with."

In *Riders* Kira creates a scene where the sky dominates and the riders merely skim the surface. She uses an Impressionist style to create a sense of movement as the horses and riders trot across the prairie. In this 5' by 4' painting, the sky stretches from the viewer's feet, over the head, and up into the sun. The result is an experience of 180 degrees of sky... a feeling intimately known by this "Big Sky" artist.

Although Kira doesn't allow any prints to be made of her works, she has made her work available in the form of handmade silk scarves. The silk scarf of *Riders* is available in her Big Sky Town Center gallery and half of the proceeds are donated to a local nonprofit that benefits children. ■

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2020 NEW YEAR'S EVENT WITH ART & MUSIC

Featuring Kira Fercho painting in a quick-draw format accompanied by regional musicians.

Like a jazz musician improvising, Kira will begin her set without a pre-conceived idea of what will end up on the canvas. Lori Rosolowsky and David Heinzen will perform an eclectic mix of classical, popular, and jazz standards. The performance will offer attendees the opportunity to view Kira at the easel, translating the music to art. In the end, a painting will be produced.

Lori Rosolowsky is a Bozeman-based pianist, singer-songwriter, educator, performer, producer, and CEO and founder of Open Sky Artists, LLC, an arts management and consulting firm that creates flourishing partnerships for artists and venues while producing captivating events. David Heinzen is a graduate of Boston University's School of Music, played principal cello for the Billings Symphony for 12 years, and currently plays principal for the Intermountain Opera and performs with other regional ensembles including the Big Sky Festival Orchestra.

JANUARY 1, 2 & 3 | 6-9:00pm
CONFERENCE ROOM OF
THE WILSON HOTEL
BIG SKY TOWN CENTER

*The event is free. Please email
kira.fercho.art@gmail.com for tickets.*



"For Kira Fercho, the painting process doesn't begin with a blank canvas but rather with an open mind." —WHJ

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