



PHOTO BY BOB OWEN

Steve Hearn stands beside one of the paintings that may be on display at the Colborne Art Gallery starting on Sept. 13. All of his works include social and philosophical messages displayed through the imagery

Symbolism to tell stories

*New show starts Sept. 13
at Colborne Art Gallery*

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Using black and white acrylic, artist Steve Hearn creates art with a message. Using symbolism he tells stories and put forward lessons in non-denominational morality.

The First Nations artist (Steve is a member of the Saulteaux Ojibwa band) actually sees himself as a bridge between the white and native cultures. His father was raised off the Alderville reservation after Steve's grandmother had him. She was first nations but her husband was white. At that time, they were not allowed to remain on the reservation.

Steve's mother was raised on a reservation at Long Plain, Manitoba. She was a child of the residential school system and gave up her status in the 1950s for a few dollars and the right to vote in Canadian elections. At the time, she was convinced it was better to join the white world.

Ironically, it was Steve's father who imparted much of his First Nations culture to his son.

Steve remembers his father

reading him *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* at bedtime. Much of the philosophy that Steve now lives by came from the many talks they had when he was young.

At age six, Steve knew about Red Cloud and Chief Joseph was his hero. Twenty years ago he stopped using colour in his work, relying on contrast to convey the story. He feels that it allows the viewer to focus on the symbolism.

When he first started painting he reworked his ideas in pen and ink, a lengthy process. He's cut that down considerably by using a computer. One of his recent works contains three panels, depicting past, present and future. It deals with letting go and looking forward. This is accomplished using cormorants and symbolic elements in the background.

For the past 10 years, Steve has been creating his work at Elliot Lake. Much of his work has been used in an awareness program he developed to teach children in schools about the First Nation culture and values. More than 2,500 children have been through the program.

continued on page 2

Symbolism in art

continued from page 1

He prefers to talk to children about his work. He finds that adults want to question everything and argue what it's like to experience racism. He has had plenty of that but refuses to allow cynicism to affect his work. His father once told him to keep his anger by his heart, so that he knew where it was and could contain it.

He's dealt with some criticism by ignoring it. When he first faced it he realized that the person making the criticism didn't know what Steve was trying to do.

He recognizes that his work is like a catalog of his life. His art is coming through as lessons he has learned. He gets a design in his mind, and as he is working on it, it grows. The symbolism is not traditional, and this confuses some First Nations artists who view his work. It comes from both cultures.

He moved to Colborne in March with his daughter Tara, returning to the area where he grew up.

The four-artist show with Floyd Kuptana, Ishauqtuq Michael, and Harry Kataquapit opens September 13 at the Colborne Art Gallery.

22