"THERE’S GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS!"
Jim Storm · Wednesday, September 27th, 2017

"THERE’S GOLD IN THEM THAR HILLS!" But it’s not the gold of Rodeo Drive or Fifth Avenue. There’s gold to be given to the young people who are spread out over the plains of Pine Ridge, South Dakota. It comes in the way of the world of the artists and craftsman. It comes from the elders of the Lakota people passing on what they have spent a life time learning themselves. They are the ones giving life to the ancient culture and slowly the people are showing signs of improvement both socially and economically.

Witnessing the devastation of the Lakota People following the 1890 Massacre at Wounded Knee, the great Medicine man Black Elk spoke of “the Circle” which had finally been broken and would “not heal for seven generations.”

Over the past several months, we have had the privilege to speak with and photograph artists and craftsmen during our time on Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. Each of these artists have shared the profound pride they carry for their people and the rich fulfillment of passing on what they have learned to the youth of their Nation. In short, “TO GIVE. IT’S THE LAKOTA WAY.”

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For forty years, Gus Yellowhair has shared his mastery in the art of making the traditional drum, used in Native American prayer and ceremonies. “Not only do I like to share the art of drum making,” says Yellowhair, “but also the spirituality associated with it in awakening the spirit of the student.” Photography by Jim Storm.

The beautiful traditional drums hand made by Gus Yellowhair. Photography by Jim Storm.

As a Masters of Art student, Keith Braveheart returns home in the summer months to share his craft and knowledge with the young artists. Photography by Jim Storm.
Wade Patton is in the Native Plains Indian Artist Residency at the University of South Dakota. He recently published a book introducing young people to the beginnings of their language and culture, through exquisite and powerful illustrations. Photography by Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto.

Kimimilia Richards is a delightful aspiring artist in the Rolling Rez Arts van program, supported by First Peoples Fund. Photography by Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto.

Young artists, such as Leroy Janis, are speaking eloquently through the insight and passion of their paintings. Photography by Jim Storm.

Joel Pullman is an advocate for Justice, particularly the fight for White Clay, through the creative and passionate expressions in his Ledger Art. Photography by Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto.

Ledger artist, Dwayne Wilcox shares a left of center sense of humor, while displaying a poignant, sharp-edge comment illustration universal to all Native Americans. Photography by Jim Storm.

Gilson Ten Fingers has embraced his dreams artistically through the use of leather, wood, stone, beads, and rawhide. Shown here is Gilson’s dream inspired art piece named Wi Wilia, a spirit of the first thunderstorm. Photography by Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto.
Molina Parker expresses disappointment in the deprivation laid upon the Lakota people from the outside world. Through her intricate tribal beadwork, she expresses a powerful voice of the creativity of her people. Photography by Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto.

Stunning example of Molina Parker’s exquisite beadwork. Photography by Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto.

Molina Parker inspires neighborhood children, while her daughter proudly follows in her footsteps. Photography by Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto.

As crazy with a paint brush as he is on his motorcycle, Jim Yellowhawk is a cutting-edge artist with great creative diversity. Photography by Jim Storm.

Mary Bordeaux and Peter Strong, owners of the “Racing Magpie“, are both arts and culture consultants with a focus on Native art and the local community of Rapid City, South Dakota. Photography by Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto.

The Two Bulls family is a clear example of the heartwarming restoration of the Lakota spirit. Steeped in the tradition of cultural stories and spiritual life, the elders have passed down through the generations native creative talents in painting, music, sculpting, and intricate beadwork.
Photography by Jim Storm.

Bios for the authors and photographers, Jim Storm and Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto

(Feature image of Gus Yellowhair wearing the traditional headdress of the Lakota Náčha Society – Photography Credit: Jim Storm; Article and photography by Jim Storm and Dr. Valerie J. Pronio-Stelluto.)

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