

## CJ Shelton - ?Illuminating the Creative Spirit?

Written By CONSTANCE SCRAFIELD

On the rough wall, a large painting in black hangs, of a powerful horse, heavy footed, stamping its way toward you. Head down, nostrils flared, this horse is broaching no nonsense. The horse's details and determination are clear. The painting is called ?Courage.?

?I'm going on nine years here in the Alton Mill, in 2019.? said the artist, CJ Shelton, also a mandala artist, to begin her list of talents. ?I do all sorts of painting and I teach a lot. I am painting a series of horses depicting human virtues.?

Talking about her classes with the older generation, ?Using art as a way of discovering the world around us and our place in it, a lot of my clientele is probably between 50 and 70 -a lot of them are retired and learning to do the things they never did while they were working and raising kids. Now they're learning about themselves and the next phase of their lives.?

She said, ?The people who find me, they're searching: there has to be more. People who have not thought to indulge in that sort of thing ? some simply have more time. They're not in jobs or raising kids, they ask, what more can I do with my life?

?Drawing and painting, people want to reconnect with that. I teach classes, start them seeing with new eyes, developing new skills. It's more than that ? art is very healing.

Teaching kids is not the biggest part of what I do. Showing a different way of looking at the world for people who are looking for a bit more. I go deep with people --seniors to young persons.

?I do a lot of different things,? she explained. ? always with the art, nature and spiritually, underlying all my work, whether I'm doing a class or one on one counselling.?

A Shamanic practitioner , CJ Shelton employs indigenous methods of working with a circle and traditional healing and the wisdom of nature, teaching these lesson both inside and out of buildings

?I use feathers and touch stones from nature in my work. There are feathers and stones arranged always in my studio. Circular shape is what's central to spirituality and Indigenous healing.?

?I've been calling myself CJ for the last 20 years. When I was doing technical illustrations in the 70's and 80's, it was so nobody would know I was a woman. In high school, I was the first girl doing drafting ? it's actually good because people remember it.?

To learn the skills of Shamanic practice, she studied with Pete Bernard, an Algonquin medicine person about 10 years ago.

?I did three years of training with him, I've been doing this work for 12 or 13 years. This is a direct result of my own healing journey: I suffered from repetitive stress injury, had surgery and was angry about that. I was attracted to shamanism to heal myself and that becomes service to others. I bring my own experience of walking that path.

?I have certain gifts,? she acknowledged. ?Now I understand them and I wanted to learn what went from there. You start by healing yourself and end up being of service to others.

?People will see my art but there's much more to it. I do energy work as well. Mostly, right now, I'm working out of my own studio. I moved to this area almost 9 years ago ? kind of starting from scratch. My own space is highly tuned so I try to work here.?

Of her reasons for loving the Alton Mill Arts Centre, CJ said, ?I love the blend of nature, architecture and nature . I did a lot of heritage work at one time. This place is a beautiful setting. I moved here from Newmarket. I made a decision to move here and start

over ? this is such a beautiful area.

?I write too. That's is another one of amy passions. My newsletter is very well received.

The winter solstice, is a matter of balance. When we're in troubling times, we remember everything is always in constant change. We need the dark to appreciate the light.

?If you look at nature, it just is, everything is balanced. It is the understanding that this too will pass. Everything has a beginning and an end. Humans that were out of of step, thinking that things in nature are good or bad.?

She said of the coming Solstice and new year, ?This threshold point between the old and the new is where hope lives.?