Engagement in the Camp Fire: The Year of Tears

Artist Statement

Bobbie Rae Jones Acrylic on Canvas, 4 X 4’

During the Camp Fire 2018, I began volunteering at the Disaster Recovery Center with the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation and continued to volunteer with Tzu Chi until they hired me as a Disaster Case Manager for long term recovery. Currently, I work with survivors who eleven months after the fire are homeless and live each day like the fire was yesterday. Out of all the years of my life this year I have sat comforting people with more tears than ever before.

This painting is the most recent in a feminist art series and began with an interview with Katie Machek. The conversation we had generated the visual imagery for “creating intimacy with the gaze.” Other ideas expressed during the initial meeting with Katie are “talking with people to feel love and calmness," our “collective soul consciousness as One,” and “people mirroring you out of your isolation.” That conversation took place on October 12, 2018. In a 2019 conversation, she said, “…ripples of truth have rung from the essence of the experience. Love, community and connection.”

I used her portrait for the two figures that mirror one another in this painting, and other influences are from Tibetan Buddhist tradition; blazing wisdom fire that surround the figure is one symbol of suchness. The color blue represents anger which contained, transforms into the wisdom of clarity or mirror-like wisdom. Tantra, represented by the infinity symbol under the hands in this painting is the continuum or that which is constant regardless of external phenomenon. Our natural state continues and is untarnished regardless of experience just as a mirror never changes regardless of what passes over its face. My wish would be that this painting brings freshness to the view of suffering from loss that is currently experienced by those affected by tragedy. This was my muse of meditation in its creation.