

TUESDAY, MAY 3, 2011

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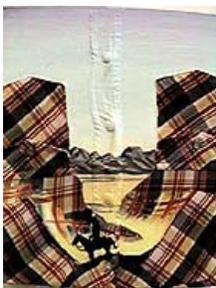
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letter from wyoming

by **Cindy Tower**



For three weeks earlier this year the New York artist Cindy Tower took up residence at the Ucross Foundation at the foothills of the Blackhorn Mountains near Sheridan, Wyo. Staying with a composer and two writers, each with their own cabin in the middle of nowhere, Tower completed scores of paintings of the Western landscape. She set up her easel in the back of her pickup truck, and painted on polka-dotted and plaid shirts and dresses bought from local thrift shops and stretched up like ordinary canvas. The works are currently on view at Serge Sorokko Gallery in SoHo, Apr. 25-May 23, 1998. The letter below describes her experience.

I'm at the Silver Spur Cafe on Main Street. There's a sign out front saying, "Welcome, Stranger." Actually, I'm in town -- I had to drive 60 miles to get there -- where there is even a post office. I'm mailing this there.

I've just done an errand -- bartering. An old man who has a sharpening company gave me some old, used saw blades in exchange for a couple of ones that I had painted. He chose a picture of an antelope and an Indian.

Also, my truck has been broken. I went to a second mechanic at 6 a.m. this morning. I have a wiring/computer problem which is hard to find. The truck just stops running. I brought a new battery just in case -- it will make the trip back rather hairy.

We have also had another blizzard this week. Two feet of snow on the ground and every day it has rained. Right now it is pouring rain and it will melt the snow, I hope.

Despite all the drama, however, I have been painting. Mostly in the studio, which I hate. I have seven paintings still to finish -- which requires sunshine -- ugh! I'm hoping to do them tomorrow.

There is one rather nice little adventure to tell you about. Last Saturday there was a huge windstorm and I was in the studio working. My friend Liz from Story, Wyo., surprised me and came in to see what I was working on. I decided to take a break and go for a hike with her.

One day when I'd been painting by the side of the road, I met a rancher who stopped to see what I was doing. He was pretty cool -- I was painting a rather wacky scene of his ranch that had earmuffs floating in the sky. Anyway, he told me that on the top of the mountain I was painting there was a prehistoric Indian ruin.

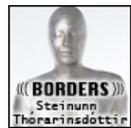
So, when Liz and I went hiking, I suggested we climb the mountain. We had to hike through a plowed field (I had clogs on), across two streams and through heavy cattle country -- there were cow flops everywhere. We passed coyote and deer skeletons. At the top was an amazing view up and down the valley. Looking down we saw a red tail hawk floating and surfing the wind -- we were higher than the hawk.

We couldn't find any Indian stuff. I looked at the peak behind us, part of the same mountain, and saw some crumbly rocks on top. We climbed up there, and sure enough there was a small wall made out of the outcropping in a rough circle shape. We sat inside this "nest" and suddenly there was no wind, it was warm and *quiet*.

There were no pottery shards, shells or arrowheads or any Indian material anywhere on the site. If it had been a lookout, it was odd that it wasn't built on the first peak. We thought maybe it was a prayer hut or a place to dream. It was too high up to be a dwelling.

So when we got back down this hill we stopped at the rancher's house to thank his wife Peggy for letting us trespass. I asked her what she thought it was. After she showed us her

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paintings and her fossil collection, she finally pulled out her arrowhead collection and then the conversation switched to Indians. It was as if we had to go through an initiation ceremony ourselves before she'd tell us anything.

Turns out, she thinks it was an eagle trap. Indians would stretch hides over the structure like a drum. They'd be underneath the hide looking up at the sky through a hole in the hide. On top of this hole would be placed a dead rabbit with a rope attached. When an eagle with a six-foot wingspan would descend to clutch the rabbit, the Indians would pull on the rope and the eagle would be caught in the bison hide. They needed eagle feathers for ceremonies.

She also showed us some prehistoric buffalo bones she'd found and some meteorites -- nine of them, all perfectly round and smooth from the speed and heat.

Anyway, I've got to go mail this. Enclosed is the only souvenir that I could find, anywhere. Shopping is confined to gas stations. Wyoming has such a poor economy that there is nothing to buy anyway.

