

The Healing Bear

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"The Healing Bear" was a challenging piece for me because I had to internalize Karen's pain purely through her words. I talked with Karen over the phone, which gave me the initial push to start on the painting, but when I was stuck, I emailed her and she responded with this amazing description of metaphors and colors. That was what really helped me.

I kept on referring to the notes I had from our phone conversation and the email descriptions she sent me, going back and forth from reading and imagining the abstract shapes and colors, then applying them to the painting.

The most powerful description Karen gave me was when she said the pain felt "as if the devil is squeezing and dragging all the rest of me down," so that's what I made sure to depict, particularly with a devil's hand on the bottom right side that was dragging her down and leaving its mark across the painting.

The colors she often mentioned were red and blue, which reminded me of throbbing blood cells and veins. The sharp blue and red lines represent the stabbing sensation of her pain. I blended a bear into the thick abstractions because of its symbolic significance in Native American culture to "healing and protection."

The bear in the painting is trying to protect Karen from the devils hand dragging her down, the stabbing lines, and all the pain clouding her, to help her keep hope and continue her fight against the tormenting pain.