

Alaina Buffalo Spirit has drawn on her own experiences and heritage, giving her art a blend of humor and struggle.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALAINA BUFFALO SPIRIT

Ledger Art Renaissance

Northern Cheyenne artist Alaina Buffalo Spirit makes an unlikely journey to become one of the nation's leading female ledger painters

BY ANIKA M. HANISCH

Wind chimes stir outside and sunlight filters in through the willows in the yard. Alaina Buffalo Spirit sits on a stool near the window with a canvas balanced on one knee, a palette of bright acrylics on the other. She wants to work in natural light for this part of the painting, wants to feel closer to the piece.

Her posture is that of a woman embroidering and calls to mind the fact that Buffalo Spirit began in the fabric arts. She used to paint and sell decorative

panels for jean jackets. That was in the 1980s, and since then, the Billings artist has come into her own. It was not an easy path; her art often speaks of struggle, both personal and communal, and as she puts it, the choice to see beauty in the midst of it all.

As she paints, Buffalo Spirit tells her story and explains her process, how she carves her own path, honoring her personal heritage and borrowing from others, mixing deep spiritual meaning with light-hearted humor.