

# Leonard Beam: True to His Own Ideas

WRITTEN BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT | PHOTOS BY MIKE DAVIS



▲ Leonard Beam in his Pinecone Art Gallery between two works that seem to explore the residential school experience. The birds suggest freedom, while the Thunderbird, frequently seen in his work, is a powerful symbol of the culture that was forbidden during the '60s Scoop.



▲ Images of power from a couple of cultures: a *pieta*, Thunderbirds, bison, a rainbow, and a dark figure of Leonard in a field, with the words "The Rain/Bow Shield 2."



▲ Three birds fly or escape during moonshine, while below, three faintly painted figures are walking.

One sign of good art is that the more you look at a work, the more you see and appreciate. This is true of the creations of Leonard Beam. His mixed-media paintings use various surfaces, acrylics, inks, tempura paints and photo transfers to create dream-like compositions with layers of possible meanings.

As a child of the "60s Scoop," when Native children were taken from their homes in an attempt to assimilate them into the dominant culture of

the time, Leonard seems to be exploring this trauma in some of his works, even repeating themes in various ways. Leonard makes frequent use of birds, feathers, photographs of old cars, and words. Birds and feathers seem to suggest flight, freedom or escape. The older-model cars have a beauty but may indicate the experience of being taken away from home.

He uses letters and language in word play that makes you think of words in a new way, especially with a perspective that reflects

Native experiences. Letters may not be the first thing you see in some of his works, but after careful study, they gradually become visible. The palindrome "live evil" appears in one work; "HORSE POWER" in another. The name of one of his exhibitions was "The Traveling Alter Native Medicine Show."

If Leonard's last name is familiar, it's because members of his extended family are also artists. His brother, Carl Beam, was the first Native artist to have contemporary

work bought by the National Gallery of Canada. Carl's wife is Ann Beam, who has been featured in this magazine, and his niece is Anong Beam, a painter and paint maker.

Leonard's Pinecone Art Gallery is located in M'Chigeeng on Manitoulin Island. Along with beautiful small works of cabinetry, there are paintings of all sizes, plus prints and lithographs. Prices range from \$60 to \$5,000.

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▲ Wordplay adds humour to this work that acknowledges the border state of Michigan and travel between two countries.



▲ Dreamlike images are bordered by the red letters of HORSE POWER, while at the bottom looms the dark block of an institutional building.

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