

Deb Haaland as Ogimaakwe by Rev'd Dr. Matthew Cobb



This powerful painting of Deb Haaland entitled "Ogimaakwe (Leader Woman)" by artist activist Claire Cobb mixes Indigenous and Christian symbolism with ancient archetypes.

The tradition of the Black Madonna has long interested Claire. Her Prababcia and Babcia (Polish for great grandmother and grandmother) had a devotion to the Eastern Orthodox Our Lady of Czestochowa (Czarna Madonna). Claire's Prababcia developed a devotion to the Black Madonna when she was in a Nazi work camp in Germany after fleeing her village as a teenager. Revered as a Goddess figure or God-bearer, the Czarna Madonna is fierce in her longing for justice and right relationship with all beings. Thus the devotees of justice seek her fierce interaction within the divine feminine. She takes away fear and replaces it with gentle nudges to courageous action.

This painting is an Anishinaabeg (Real People) version of the Black Madonna. The painting symbolizes the "progress" of industrial modern man and his manifest destiny to harness, tame, and dominate his 'God ordained' capacity to do with nature as he pleases—represented by the black snake of Tar Sands crude pumped from up north down south in 36 inch pipes, until almost crossing the Great River Mississippi. The Goddess' right foot stops its 'forward progress' and the thunderbolt of lightning (Indigenous knowledge) halts its poisonous track. The spirits of the river are depicted as orbs of consciousness giving personhood to the Mississippi, which bears witness to how great rivers are co-created by many streams and tributaries flowing into and sustaining life along the waterway. All those tiny tributaries contribute to the greatness of the river, even though industrial agribusiness has tried to alter the current flow by dams and levies.

Meanwhile, the three archetypes of animal spirits that show up are the three on Turtle Island (North America) who have no natural predator, other than the hubris and avarice of modern man's efficient progress. The lion, bear and bison effectually do not require a sympathetic nervous system and therefore do not exhibit fear in the wild. These animals remind all of us to relinquish our fear as we turn to the emerging face of the divine feminine in our resistance and renunciation of all forms of domination and violent oppression. Red cardinal shows up as a reminder to keep the fire in our hearts through the gifts of humility and reverence. This is best practiced within the art of cultivating a sense of humor through storytelling: "While painting the bear onto the mural, a rare showing of a male cardinal emerged in a bush nearby. He stayed a while and sang several songs for us as we continued to paint. Inevitably, I asked him what he wanted. Mr. Cardinal said, 'I want to be in that scene, too.'"

The child in the Black Madonna's arms is the archetype of possibility with the green book of nature placed in his hands. The re-wilding of natural places and re-indigenization of tribal lands is a force that can be resurrected within our land and people, so that Tribal Sovereignty can thrive as we coexist and co-tenant this most precious gift of creative unity. Furthermore, the divine energies within the buck skin dress that the goddess, the Black Madonna, adorns is respectful of all our relatives who have come along and gone forward to the great mystery beyond. The buck skin protects and ordains all of Her prayers for the land and people.

Finally, the face of U.S. Representative (NM-1) Deb Haaland was chosen due to her leadership and advocacy for first peoples and new émigrés. Most of our 11 million undocumented migrant workers are without representation and Deb listens to the voice of the voiceless. Deb knows this by her own identity as a Native American who is often unseen, effectually invisible or deliberately forgotten. Therefore, she is our universal representative and as Secretary of the Interior be empowered by her office "to lift up the lowly," a New Magnificat for our age.

The Rev'd Dr. Matthew Cobb, is Claire Cobb's father as well as Vicar of three parishes in Minnesota that serve a large Native American population including the two nations of Red Lake and Leech Lake. Fr. Cobb is co-founder of First Nations Kitchen North and Good News Garden True North, which focus on Food Justice & Sovereignty and Restoration of indigenous species and protected pollinators. He is founder of Walks Back, LLC offering cross cultural and leadership development design for communities and corporations seeking change via wisdom and inclusion. In addition to his many academic degrees, he is certified as a 'Daring Way' Facilitator, Teacher Trainer in Adaptive Leadership, and an Integral Transformative Practice practitioner.