

York

Acrylic on canvas

\$600.00

Eric Wuest

Artist's Statement

In Renee Watson's wonderful book *Piecing Me Together*, young artist Jade is learning about the Lewis and Clark Expedition in school. She is particularly interested in the slave York, who accompanied the pair to the Pacific coast. Jade uses scrap paper and objects to piece together images to tell the story of York.

York was a valuable part of the team, and he contributed just like the other members--hunting, fishing, setting up camp. He was also very important to the expedition because the Native Americans worshiped him, so they were willing to trade with the rest of the expedition. Because of his dark skin, they thought he was the god of the black bear.

He crossed rivers and mountains on the expedition and experienced freedom and equality, but when he returned east he was a slave once again. Finally winning his manumission from Clark, York seems to disappear from history books, but explorers that followed in their footsteps reported meeting an African man living among the [Crows](#) in north-central Wyoming in 1834:

“In this village we found a negro man, who informed us that he first came to this country with Lewis & Clark – with whom he also returned to the State of Missouri, and in a few years returned again with a Mr. Mackinney, a trader on the Missouri river, and has remained here ever since - which is about ten or twelve years. He has acquired a correct knowledge of their manner of living, and speaks their language fluently. He has rose [sic] to be quite a considerable character, or chief, in their village; at least he assumes all the dignities of a chief, for he has four wives, with whom he lives alternately”.

During their adventures the explorers were attacked by a grizzly bear and York saved his master's life. In my painting *York* I imagine him telling the story of how he saved his traveling companions from a grizzly bear attack. He holds a tooth from a necklace he made to prove his story to those who might doubt him. The stars of Ursa Major (Great Bear) shine in his night sky and echo the gleam in his eyes as he tells his story.

Bio

Eric Wuest has been an exhibiting artist for forty years. He has participated in the Artists in Residence program through the Salem Art Association and taught painting, drawing and figure studies in their adult classes. His paintings and drawings were shown in the Governor's Office at the Oregon State Capitol Building in June 2004. Although his focus continues to be on drawing and painting, he recently began working on print-making with the addition of an intaglio press to his studio. Eric's work appears in *Art for Everyone*, a textbook published by Chemeketa Community College. He has illustrated two books by Eugene author Alan Contreras, and he is a regular contributor to shows throughout the Willamette Valley.

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