

# Art in the natural world

By **Helen Schmidling**  
Correspondent

Caroline Stratton-Crow stepped back from hanging the last piece of art on the wall and exclaimed, “This is really pretty scary — seeing all of my art in one place!”

This month, Stratton-Crow’s whimsical, natural watercolors and acrylics are hanging on the walls of the Community Room at Sisters Library. This collection is not a comprehensive view of her creative art. She left the three-dimensional spirit masks and horses at home. More than 20 paintings in the library represent her signature images: junipers, horses, ravens and owls, plus a few watercolor landscapes.

The earliest piece in this show is called “Dancing Junipers.” She loves junipers, because they grow in the most difficult conditions, and the junipers that grow in rockier soil have more character than the ones that grow in easy conditions. Stratton-Crow’s junipers are gnarly, yet whimsical, in stripes of gray, brown, and tan that twist playfully around the trunks and branches.

Her horses are an expression of freedom, strength, and power. “I’ve been horse crazy since I was a little girl,” she said with a wide grin. “It’s a focus on connection, and it’s why so many young women grow to love horses. There’s an ongoing communication,” she said, about the connection between horse and rider, and the freedom and feeling of riding. She got her first horse when she was in eighth grade. “I set up jumps and rode all the time. I was ridiculously

smitten,” she said. She had to find a new home for her first horse when she went off to college, but since then, she has acquired five more horses, all mares, and has made each one since the first a life commitment. “I just make it work for me.”

Owls are another prominent symbol in Stratton-Crow’s work. “I just see them all the time when I go out riding,” she said. “They just show up in my life, through the trees,” whether she’s out walking, or riding one of her horses. “They are a spirit animal for me.” It’s unusual that she sees owls during the daytime, because they are nocturnal, but she thinks

the daytime owls are bringing the dark into the light. Sometimes she paints a single owl and other times perches owls in the branches of junipers. Owls are a symbol of wisdom, and Stratton-Crow strives for wisdom.

And what about the crows? “Well, I’m married to one,” she laughs (Her husband is Jim Crow). But the birds on the branches or in the sky are really ravens, not crows. “They’re in the same family, that includes magpies and jays, but they do not interbreed.” To Stratton-Crow, they are quick-witted and smart, and they represent magic, and she says, “I love the magical.”



PHOTO BY HELEN SCHMIDLING

The work of Caroline Stratton-Crow is on display at Sisters Library.

Stratton-Crow grew up in Delmar, New York, a suburb of Albany. She moved to the Oregon Coast as a teenaged

hippie, and studied at Oregon State. She learned astrology,

See **ART SHOW** on page 9

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