

## Christina's Art

The art studio is located just five sycamores and one Union Pacific “No Trespassing” sign down the street from the Curtis Park Beauty Salon. These sycamores, planted in what was once a well-tended grassy strip between the sidewalk and the street curb, are surrounded by a variety of overgrown urban weeds and scrub bushes which barely hide last year's fast food litter. Their large, broad leaves with their swollen veins have turned a dozen shades of bronze and rust and orange and brown. The leaves, still pliant to the touch, feel almost leather-stiff. They are not ready to fall just yet. They are poised, waiting for the Thanksgiving storms, followed by the paralyzing frosts, to set them free.

Despite the rustic beauty of their foliage, these sycamores, which form a buffer between the last north/south street of the neighborhood and the hundreds of acres of rail yard wastelands behind the studio, are not nearly as majestic or as tall as their neighborhood counterparts closer to Curtis Park. It has been too many years since these trees have received any human touch of care, not even a drop of water, during the long hot Sacramento summers. Their sister trees, lining both sides of the streets throughout the neighborhood, have grown so tall and magnificent that they meet high above the street centers and form fall-colored leafy cathedrals for the protection and enjoyment of their owners. These streets most certainly proclaim Sacramento's famous quality of life.

Perhaps the faithful – but struggling – sycamores that guard Women's Wisdom best symbolize the program. Like these sycamores, the Wisdom Project is also a buffer strip – a transition, perhaps – between the urban demons and toxic zones and the quiet, peaceful streets of the neighborhood.

The artists come from the outer fringe of Sacramento's quality of life. They have been women of the streets, poor women, women without stable homes, women who have suffered abuse from their earliest years. But it is just these women that Women's Wisdom welcomes into the art studio at the buffer edge of this elegant neighborhood. These women have talent, these women have ability, these women possess an inner strength that startles us. These women are artists bent on unleashing their creativity in order to remake themselves.

Christina says it best with her poem written last September in Wisdom's creative writing workshop:

When I was in the door it was a little light shining  
in but I was lost skinny starving drug up and scared afraid  
with the demons weak lost messed up not myself and when I  
was on the 8th floor in San Francisco's earthquake I seen  
a light shining more bright in my heart it made me run  
straight through the other side of the door in peace love  
understanding and in to art that was always there but the  
help of the Women's Wisdom Project and all teachers I had keep  
sweet with all new lives on the other door.

As many times as we have read Christina's poem, slowly and aloud, we are still amazed at the insight of this young woman. How she is able to express in such a few simple words her appreciation of Women's Wisdom. How could we possibly explain our mission with any more insight?

Christina's painting, "The Happy Clown," on display in our small gallery, gives us yet another reason why Women's Wisdom Project must survive. Her clown's ice cream cone eyes and happy smile, his cloak covered with multi-colored hearts, and his tall dunce cap, a veritable mosaic of flashing bright colors, says, "I'm a happy clown; I want to make you happy, too."

This formerly homeless woman – no, this artist – has something affirming and precious to offer the Sacramento community, and it is because of Wisdom she is able to do so. There are dozens of women like Christina, who are creating art at Wisdom – each one hopeful and determined to rewrite their life's script.