

# "The Ladder"

2009. 22" H X 26" W, Acrylic on canvas

*Christine Stark, Native American sexual abuse survivor, and David Feinberg, with drawing contributions from artists Ali Abdulkadir, Bonnie Brabson, Rowan Pope, Stephanie Thompson, and Peter Lommen.*

Throughout her childhood and into her teen years, Chris endured enormous sexual abuse by her father and grandfather, who sold her as a prostitute and forced her to perform in pornographic videos. Chris still struggles with her traumatic past, but states that she is managing to live functionally. Chris sees her experience as a continuation of the organized sexual violence that was used as a weapon against her people for centuries.

The central image of this painting is a tree, which represents Chris' family tree, and celebrates the Native ancestry of her family. The tree occupies the negative brown space in the bottom left of the piece; a resilient branch stretches upward and to the right. The tree is severed because her grandmothers, both of whom were Natives to America, were disconnected from that Native ancestry. Even though the tree is broken, a part of the tree is still growing, which represents a part of Chris that has managed to grow. The strip of film in the painting represents the pornographic videos in which Chris was forced to participate. Successive lines of dots inside of gray areas echo this idea. The more randomly placed dots represent the flashes of the camera. A wooden line was added to the piece to convey a feeling of separation; Chris spoke of how her abuse split her life between two different worlds. The scattered formation of lines throughout the piece were applied as she struggled to tell her story; an outward representation of internal conflict with her past. A ladder in the painting represents Chris' efforts to make a connection to her family and her ancestry that is critical to making her whole again.