

My Artistic Journey

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## MY ARTISTIC JOURNEY

This paper is written for the purpose of completing my masters degree with a concentration in creative arts at Carthage College of Kenosha. In here, I will explain how my interests and inspirations were developed and applied to create the series of paintings and mixed media artwork. I will discuss how my choice for my subject matter began with the horse figure and eventually led me to a more open theme of the feminine. I will highlight the different choices of media involved using the delicate handmade papers and Japanese tissue which led me into working with images of women where texture became a literal element.

I contribute my first interest in artistic expression to my mother and her love for horses and to the environment I was raised in. I can remember as a young child feeding clumps of grass to my neighbor's dozen or so horses who were fenced on the opposite side of the lane which ran along the apple orchid behind our farmhouse. My interest went from feeding the horses to begging for rides on the draft horses when Mr. Harmson worked them in the fields. Sitting on the backs of these massive giants and gripping the top of the harness was the highlight of my day. Of course, the first thing I started to draw was the horse and the horse has been a part of my world ever since. My interest was also fueled by a wonderful and encouraging art teacher I had in the ninth grade.

Upon entering college I was exposed to the influence of other artists and professors. The opportunity was there to search and explore various styles and techniques from the

master artists. My art experience after college involved painting along with pen and ink drawings with mostly realistic interpretations. However, I drew and painted within my comfort zone. After a period of raising children and running a business for 15 years, I decided to come back to the educational world of teaching. I worked with another teacher who was taking courses at Carthage College and she encouraged me to begin on my Master's Degree. It was this beginning experience that showed me "I could use color as a means of expressing my emotion and not a transcription of nature" as quoted by Andre' Derain.

After being introduced to Professor Diane Levesque, I was guided with her assistance in planning my program. She recommended that I should start an Independent Study with her in taking various courses. It had been thirty years since I was in college and I felt quite unprepared for this new challenge. I reflected on this as I started my new experiences in my classes and was determined to learn new methods of expressing myself.

The paper-making courses were the first new experiences for me as I had never used this medium. Professor Ed Kalke was the instructor who opened up the floodgates of artistic expression. It was fascinating to learn the technique of mixing the pulp, dragging the screens through the paper mix and then adding the colors to create the shapes. Colored pulp was chosen and poured or placed on a framed screen. The image was built by adding layers of pulp and string was pulled through the pulp to typify the various details. Bits of color were added as the last detail and then a sponge was used to press out the last bits of water. It was then flipped onto a canvas board and left to dry. Once it was removed from the board additional color was added using acrylic paint and



watercolor dyes. I was thrilled when my professor let me take on some larger images. This is where the group of handmade paper horses images were created. Edouard Manet has some wonderful images of horses and is quoted as saying “Go outside and use your own eyes. You’ll be surprised to see things you have never been taught.” The process of creating the horses in paper opened up new

avenues of expression . I used the carousel horse as my subject and it was important to highlight the bright colors of their harness and their incredible action. The first horse is titled “Horse In The Pink”, Fig. 1. The next piece, “Golden Ring Horse”, Fig. 2, is a collagraph of an image I had already produced in handmade paper, printed it on watercolor paper, ran the print through a large press, and than painted back into it with acrylic paints. It is one of my favorites.

Frederick Remington, a favorite western artist of mine, expresses the everyday life of the cowboy and the Indian with exciting detail





Fig.3

and beautiful colors. Since I have always been drawn to horses and the outdoors, this type of art immediately attracted my attention as a young girl. Remington portrays his subjects in exciting compositions and each painting inspires new ideas and use of color for me. The scenes are real and honest and

each scene pulls the viewer into the action of the painting. The next series of horses were oil paintings and acrylic paintings. Ms. Levesque was my instructor throughout these courses and gave much needed advice and guidance.

“Horses Gone Wild”, Fig. 3, is a diptych of multiple horses with much action as they appear to be running in all directions. This painting has a mix of the cool greens and blues along with the warm rusts and oranges. It was my intention to show the wildness and freedom of the horse. The challenging part of this painting was the placement of the horses bodies, direction of their heads, and the angle of their bodies. Choice of color was important because I did not want one horse to stand out from another. I was not at the point in my style development to use the loose, expressive brushstrokes which is typical of Manet but the blending of greens and blues with warm colors of orange and rust made this a successful experience.

“Gabriel”, Fig. 4, is a horse painting of a single horse which shows the power and massiveness of the horse. It is finished in warm, gold tones with curving, expressive lines for the background reflecting the energy of horse. This horse reminds me of the Arabian stallion I was blessed to ride for several years. The images of riding on a fall day with a

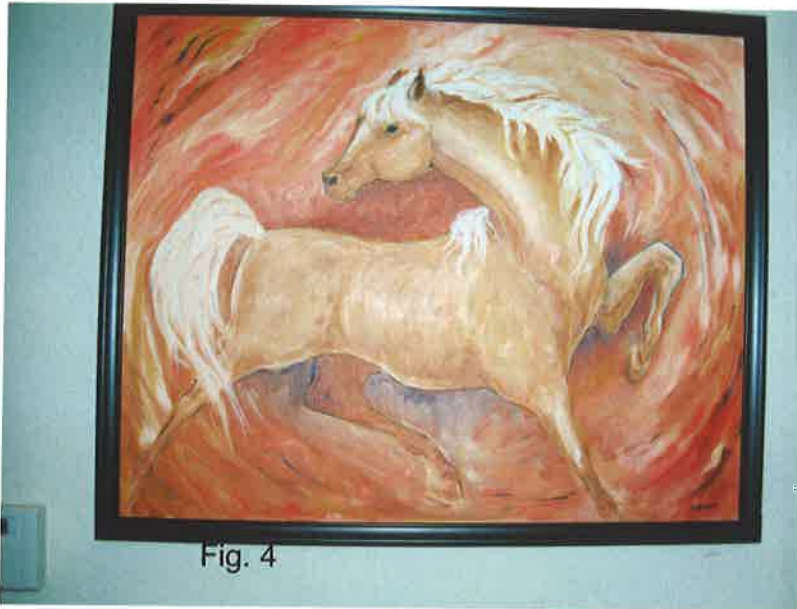


Fig. 4

beautiful countryside around me and feeling the rush of the wind as we would gallop across a field were the inspiration for this painting.

“Escape”, Fig. 5, is the painting with the circle of horses surrounded by twirling colors. It is giving the image



Fig.6

of a group of carousel horses that were freed from their stations when a bolt came loose and the horses were able to fly away. This was an oil painting which was a learning experience for me of controlling the blending of colors.

I wanted to expand my experience as far as my subject choices so I began to attempt portraits. Painting portraits was a definite challenge and as I studied various artists I could begin to see the intricate layering of

colors and delicate technique used to express the details. Gustav Klimt was a master at painting his models with soft details and used an elaborate mosaic-like background with repeating geometric shapes in beautiful patterns. The faces of his portraits are very

detailed and the composition is treated as a beautiful art object. Gold was used in his early paintings and later he became more interested in capturing his subject's personalities and painted in a free style with transparent, sketchy lines. His women figures have small heads and a low point of view which make them seem very tall and elegant. The style is known for its use of curving shapes, flat decorative patterns and handmade materials and completely captivated my attention. One of his most famous paintings is called "The Kiss" which is one of my favorites. Klimpt used gold embellishment in creating the beautiful patterns which gave the illusion of royalty to his models. His style has been an inspiration to me in painting the females in my collection.



Fig. 7

It was exciting to experiment with mixed media using the female figure as my new subject matter.

"The Release" Fig. 7, was my first attempt at using a fabric applied to the surface. It started with fabric dipped in gesso and then applied to a board and sculpted into a shape moving across the board. After applying acrylic vivid blues, golds, and reds I felt I had to add a woman with her hands raised towards the fabric. It gives the feeling that she has released something very valuable to her.

"Lady in Red" Fig. 8. was created by use of Japanese handmade papers and acrylic paint. I had discovered these beautiful papers and wanted to use their marbled patterns in a painting. The dress fabric was toile from my son's wedding and has such wonderful memories. I used the flowing patterns of the



Fig.8

color of the papers to follow the flow of the dress and display a richness which reflects the wonderful memories of that special day.

“Seated Lady”, Fig. 9, was fashioned in the same manner. Again the patterns dictated the flow of the color and the toile from the wedding was used. “Seated Lady” is a painting with a different position and includes furniture. It reminds me of the thoughtfulness of a bride as she reflects and rests after her busy day. It was

exciting to add this piece of furniture to the composition and again stretch my experience of using various shapes to produce a pleasing visual scene.

Since I have always loved drawing animals I decided to try using the specialty papers with another subject - cranes.



Fig.9

They have such beautiful, elegant lines which I thought would be perfect to express in the specialty papers. They were satisfying to produce because I was able to be detailed and also impressionistic with their shapes. The delicate papers



could be torn to resemble soft feathers or grasses. Rich contrast was also achieved with this application before I applied the acrylic. I was inspired by a wonderful photo I came across when I decided to create these cranes, Fig. 10 & 11. It had such color and



Fig. 10

interesting shapes and gave me another opportunity in using the papers and acrylic combination to portray the scene. Again I was trying to create the impression of shapes rather than a photo exactness of the bird. It was quite satisfying in learning to manipulate this material into a successful image. In the next two pieces of I will describe a technique using watercolor and fabric to create

the images.

The colors and shapes of the following pictures were produced by using watercolor dyes on moist paper, spraying the colors with water and tilting the paper in different directions to control the design.

Again I added the toile fabric in the shape of a woman or creature. She is named "Spirit of the Sea", Fig. 12, and has sea creatures around her. The

second painting is named "Spirit of the Fish", Fig. 13, and the Japanese specialty papers



Fig. 11

were used to accent shape and color. Both of these works were very spontaneous in the



Fig 12

beginning steps of the process. The shapes appeared from the colors spreading and from the use of sea salt sprinkled on the wet paint. The creatures appear to be riding a large fish or whale with many others surrounding her. These pieces were exciting to work on because I was not sure what the next step would bring out in the design. Each day I would come back to the design and discover a new

shape which could become another water element or creature.

The next mixed media project of my master's works is the portrait of my mother. It has been very satisfying to put together a piece that honors her memory. I started with a photo of her at sixteen years of age. The Japanese papers were used for her dress and acrylic was used for the paint. I began with a piece of masonite because I



Fig. 13

knew I would be attaching other objects. Since I know how much she loved roses (my favorite flower), I used an old watercolor painting of roses I had painted several years ago. This was mounted in front of her portrait. The structure that supports it all is pieces of the old barn wood from the family farm where she lived after marrying my father. I attached a painting of a farm scene which my mother had made and then applied a photo of her holding a doll (which I still have). Beautiful china dishes were the things she loved to collect and the rose plates are an example of her favorites. She told me years ago how



Fig. 14

she loved that doll that her grandfather had given her when she was five years old ( picture is attached). My mother was a wonderful Christian woman and the little gold cross (also attached) represents her strong faith. This painting of my mother was one of the most satisfying artistic endeavors I have experienced, Fig. 14.

Many of the master painters of old seem to paint out of hardships or unhappy circumstances while others

portray their enjoyment of life. Edouard Manet is quoted as saying “I feel that every work must have something to say. Otherwise, an artist shouldn’t even bother”. I want my paintings to express great color, and movement and general enjoyment of something good in the world. At this time, I do not care to do dark, foreboding images; instead, I prefer to paint something that would uplift the emotions in a positive manner. God has blessed my life in many ways by taking me through the rough times and the good times. Being able to complete this program was difficult due to some physical injuries and lack of endurance but encouragement from Ms. Levesque and friends and family helped me complete my mission. This journey has made me a better teacher and has given me the confidence to try new avenues of expression and creativeness. I am able to pass that on to my students in helping them to express themselves in multiple ways. The creative process is a learning experience that keeps paying back rewards when others can learn and grow in their confidence.

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