

ENIGMA: PAINTING FLOWERS

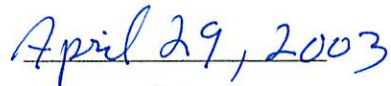
By

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Masters of Science in Administration
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Requirements of the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

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MY BACKGROUND

I was born the middle child of a Southern Baptist Minister and faced many hardships in growing up. My father accepted calls from churches that were small and therefore he did not earn very much money. I was taught to be frugal and self-reliant. My parents divorced when I was three, and due to my father's work, my grandparents assumed custody of my siblings and me. My grandparents raised me from when I was three until I was twelve when my father remarried. As a result, I assumed the old-fashioned values and rules that my grandparents lived by.

Usually the discipline and guidance fell to my grandmother who lived by the adage, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." She instilled a strong sense of knowing right and wrong, never talking badly about anyone, and standing up for one's beliefs. She also strongly believed that a young child was old enough to learn to work hard and to be responsible about work. Not long after I moved in with my grandparents, I started working in the flower garden and doing household chores. The ability to work the soil, care for the plants and be captivated by the blooms is still a major part of my life. My love of flowers is one reason I have chosen to paint them.

My earliest experience with painting came when I lived with my grandparents. My Aunt Jackie did small oil paintings to release stress while she was working on her master's degree. I was always fascinated by the way she could take a blank canvas and create wonderful abstractions and landscapes of places she had been. She gave me some of her old paints, brushes and canvas and taught me the basics of mixing and applying paint. However, I quickly lost interest and didn't paint again until I was in the Air Force.

When my siblings and I resumed our lives with my father, an emotional upheaval followed. After leaving my grandparents and returning to the harsh, unrelenting life of a preacher's child, I became an introvert. I tried to hide behind a wall of invisibility; never trying to understand myself. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge-and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves. So we are necessarily strangers to ourselves. We do not comprehend ourselves-we have to misunderstand ourselves . . . We are not men of knowledge with respect to ourselves."¹

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Nietzsche: Human, All to Human: A Book for Free Spirits," 1996

Through painting, I have found a venue in which I can search my soul, my inner thoughts, and finally embark on the journey to understand myself.

I entered the Air Force in March 1979. The Air Force provided an environment that encouraged emotional and individual growth; it was a precise, functional, and very disciplined. Over a period of twenty years in the Air Force, my personality changed from that of an introvert to that of an extrovert. The discipline and control from twenty years in the military have contributed heavily to my dedication to painting and my work habits in the studio.

While in the Air Force, I worked as a field engineer. In this area of expertise, I was sent to remote regions of the world where I saw hunger and devastation on a firsthand basis. I helped to build hospitals, schools, and housing in some of the poorest countries in the world. Seeing and empathizing with the harsh lives of other people and enduring Desert Storm made me want to paint again. Painting became my refuge in the storm of life. Through trial and error, I taught myself to use acrylics and painted for fourteen years before coming to The University of Georgia. My views on art are tempered by my experiences of growing up in rural Georgia and my career in the Air Force.

MY WORK AND ITS RELEVANCE

Flowering plants are the dominant plants of the earth and are the reason the surface of the planet is not lifeless. I see them as neither trivial entertainment nor outdoor decoration, but my metaphor for life. Georgia O’Keeffe once wrote, “Nobody sees a flower, really. It is so small. We haven’t time, and to see them takes time. Like to have a friend takes time.”² We have ceased to see the life in which we live, and it is my intent to cause the viewer to revisit the gifts we are surrounded by and to see flowers again for the first time but in a different light.

My paintings focus almost exclusively on large-scale images of flowers. Flowers are a jumping-off point for my pilgrimage in the art world. My work embraces a delight in life and a reverence of creation. I enjoy painting with vibrant colors, creating subtle images, and imbuing the paintings with lives of their own. Flowers are the means I use to

² Georgia O’Keeffe, “About Myself,” 1939

explore my feelings, desires, and precepts on life. I am fascinated with their beauty and further intrigued by the nuances of space, movement, and the relationships the blooms have to their environment. Through scale and color, I invite viewers into my intimate world and offer them my perspective on familiar subjects that are often taken for granted.

The scale of the flowers in my paintings restores them through the power of size to their rightful place in the world. I offer viewers the chance to use their imaginations and to experience these living organisms as if the flowers are residences or sanctuaries, to think of them as fellow citizens, inhabitants of a shared ecosystem, as spirits interacting with our own. By painting them, I hope to create a sense of magic that will inspire and intrigue the viewer. Louise Bourgeois believes that, "A work of art can have a spirit, because it has the magic power to provoke a reaction in the observer. If someone does not react, it's his or her loss and in this case, perhaps we should feel compassion. There is magic in our world and we can create magic."³

In my paintings, I treat the flowers as living forms. They are painted as having flesh, as sensuous creatures, corporeal beings, alive and embodied. The flowers create a visual terrain inviting imagined travel with their architectural spaces and complex constructions. Sometimes the flowers pulse and radiate like flames, like pure energy. In the studio, I live in a world of my own making: a world where I am surrounded by form and color. I strongly relate to Paul Klee when he explained, "I am become more and more obsessed by the color. I will always be possessed by it, I know. The color and I are one. I am a painter!"⁴ The color, form, and space I achieve while painting flowers lifts my spirit and my imagination soars.

By choosing to paint flowers, I realize that I have chosen to make my contributions to the art community from outside the contemporary main stream. However, I feel that my paintings offer the viewer an opportunity to share emotions, insights, and perceptions. I have created an intimate world that, while beautiful at first glance, contains subtle meanings and complexities, which I hope, will intrigue the viewers and entice them on a wondrous journey.

³ Louise Bourgeois, "Louise Bourgeois: Drawings and Observations," 1999

⁴ Paul Klee, "Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898-1918," 1964



OUT OF DESOLATION - HOPE

Oil on canvas
78 inches by 66 inches



IN PURSUIT OF PEACE

Oil on linen

60 inches by 48 inches



SCENT OF A WOMAN
Oil on canvas
48 inches by 48 inches



CONFLICT
Oil on canvas
72 inches by 48 inches



A SILENT CRY FOR HELP

Oil on canvas
60 inches by 60 inches



IT'S ALIVE!
Oil on canvas
60 inches by 60 inches