

An impressionist painting of a woman in a white dress, rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes. The color palette is dominated by warm yellows, oranges, and blues, with some darker tones in the background. The woman's face is partially obscured by the brushwork, giving it a soft, ethereal quality. The overall composition is vertical, with the woman's figure occupying most of the space.

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Cathy Locke

When Words Are Not Enough

"...It is much like the Buddhist concept of there being no beginning and no end. I like thinking that everything is just bits of energy that are always changing. In my paintings you will see particle bits in various sizes that move around the painting that represents this concept energy."

There are many artists these days who display a wealth of creative talent, and many more whose technical ability can only be described as astonishing. However, only a few artists combine those wonderful attributes with the ability to take the viewer to a place where mere words struggle to describe the feeling, the emotion, and the intrigue. One of these gifted individuals is artist Cathy Locke of San Francisco, California.

Cathy has splendid educational credentials boasting both a B.F.A. from Art Center College of Design and a M.F.A. from the Academy of Art University, both with honors. Cathy has received accolades for her work from the Pastel Society of America, Art Directors Club of New York, Society of Illustrators in Los Angeles, Connecticut Society of Portrait Artists, the Pastel Journal and Campaign Papers. She has received two Pastel 100 Awards placing her as one of the top 100 pastelists in the world. Public institutions, colleges, universities, as well as private patrons across the United States, Canada and Europe.



It is the hidden, unspoken, silent quality that whispers gently in the mind of any viewer of Cathy's art a message of serene enchantment that separates Cathy from many skilled artists. One look at the almost ghostly appearance of some of Cathy's works will confirm that she has the added ingredient that many artists yearn to discover. A kind of masked wizardry of a subtle and unobtrusive kind, if you will.

We recently spoke with Cathy about a plethora of topics from her artistic technique to emotional and experience influences.

ArtLA.com: You have a great deal of experience in so many disciplines of art, portraiture, fine art, illustration etc., which area do you feel the most passionate about...which is most natural?

Cathy: I feel passionate about all the work I create, at least while I am in the process of creating it. Even when I have done large public art projects working with committees of people I tend to get very absorbed in the process and want to figure out the best solution. I am not the type of artist who feels the process of creating is a natural and easy one. I tend to struggle with everything I do at one point or another during the process of creating a painting or drawing. I give a lot of thought to the many aspects of composition, color and concept.

My Secret Hiding Place, Oil on Canvas, 48 x 48 Inches

ArtLA.com: Some of the pieces on your ArtLA.com profile exude an almost ghostly, otherworldly intriguing quality, is this a consideration that is in the back of your mind when you create these works, or does it evolve as you paint?

Cathy: There are several themes that I consistently work with in my fine art paintings. The first is my love for abstraction, so you will always see my figures in some sort of abstracted environment. I like working with the idea that you can't tell the physical geography or time of day in my work. I want the viewer to have a visceral experience to my work. It is much like the Buddhist concept of there being no beginning and no end. I like thinking that everything is just bits of energy that are always changing. In my paintings, you will see particle bits in various sizes that move around the painting that represents this concept energy.

ArtLA.com: Your paintings seem very emotional; do you draw upon personal experiences when you work?

Cathy: I like to think of my work as carrying an essence of a universal shared experience. I want people to slow down, explore and feel the work. My work should not be something that is easily interpreted by the thinking side of our brain. For this reason people often explain my work as emotional, but my aim is for the viewer to not identify with a particular place or individual but to create their own experience.

ArtLA.com: How would you value technique verses experience as an artist?

Cathy: Of course as professional artists we all spend a lot of time learning technique. I once heard William Whitaker speak and he said by the time an artist finishes grad school they will have spent more time in school than a brain surgeon. I can't say I am not concerned with technique because of course I am. I would just say that my primary concern is with what the painting expresses not the technique.

I am not a hyper realist painter. My work is more expressive and abstract; so my focus is more on process and less on exacting technique.

ArtLA.com: When creating commissioned work, do you ever feel restricted, or do you freely allow your personal interpretations of an idea to shine through?

Cathy: In the last couple of years I have changed the type of commissioned work that I will accept. I am looking to create an expressive piece that captures the essence of an individual or place. I work with more imaginative concepts now and no longer paint formal portraits.

ArtLA.com: What would you say is the most important personal experience that you have had in life pertaining to your art?

Cathy: I was very influenced by the artists in Russia. I first experienced this paradigm shift from technically focused work to an expressive focus while studying art in Russia in 2003. I stood in front of paintings that I'd never seen before and since I had no intellectual data for these paintings I wasn't able to analyze them from the thinking part of my brain. Instead for the first time, I slowed down and read these paintings as if they were a book; viewing them became the experience. This changed the whole way I now go about creating art. I am very influenced by the concepts of critical thinking that were introduced by the Russian Avant-Garde of the early 1900's. I have also been very influenced by Mikhail Vrubel's Demon series both in concept and technique. Additionally influenced by Nicolai Fechin's cold wax technique and the conceptual works of Russian Symbolist painters. I am currently writing a book on Russian art, and I lead an art tour in Moscow and St. Petersburg every July.

Cathy Locke's beautiful art can be viewed at <http://artla.com/artists/artist.cfm?n=2&m=1750> or you can read her own personal musings at <http://cathylocke.wordpress.com/>

- Tim Broughton