

Journey into the Heart of Creativity

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"Within each of us is a creative core that actively creates the universe." (Robert Hand)

Maybe I am a late bloomer. Maybe it just took me a long time and lots of exposure, but I have finally arrived at an important juncture in my life. What I used to consider a pastime, I now consider a passion. Two creative arts, painting and writing, have become the focus of my life. I crept slowly into taking my art seriously. As a child, I watched my father paint. I learned to use watercolors when a woman down the street from my home in La Jolla, California, opened her house to the children of the neighborhood Saturday mornings and taught watercolor painting. Often we would take our tablets down to the rocks and attempt to paint the incoming surf. Later I attended the local Art Center's painting classes for children in a little white wooden building with trellises laced with flowering Wisteria vines in front. My work won at some shows, but art for me was just a pleasant thing to do. Although I continued taking art classes in school and later in college, it still was not enough of a passion to warrant full-time study. As a young adult, I studied figure drawing at the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington, D.C. and portrait painting on Long Beach Island, New Jersey. My likenesses were quite good, but the paintings lacked depth (or was it maturity?). They were more like caricatures or illustrations. What is it about a painting that defines it as great? (I am thinking about Matisse's ladies. Their faces are not anatomically correct. Their features are rendered with simple squiggles and lines and blotches of paint and yet they are so expressive.) I came to find that between years of learning to draw figures with proper proportions and dimensions, tones and contrasts, and learning to paint with style, your own style, there exists a kind of leap of faith. It takes knowing how to draw things and people as they really are to be able to draw or paint them as they appear to you the artist. And further, it takes knowing who you are to be able to relate to the model. There is nothing shy about most artists. A good example is Picasso. Knowing who you are, being secure in your own person is essential to relating to your model and painting with compassion. In the so-called modern period of art history, beginning with the Impressionists, I believe emotion comes through no matter what or who the subject is. Art has become more than a craft, a technique; it has become one of man's most wonderful expressions of himself.

After my children were raised, I began teaching part time in colleges and schools. Initially, I taught English skills: writing, grammar, poetry, short stories, drama. Then I introduced a new course to Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts: Myth, Magic, and Metaphor. In this class, I synthesized the techniques of painting with creative writing.

Each semester the class grew.

In 1924, Andre Breton wrote the *Manifesto*. This document described a new movement called Surrealism, a term he defined as: "Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by other means, the real process of thought. Thought's dictation, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations." I interpret Monsieur Breton as saying imagination was staking out a claim to its rights. Gertrude Stein wrote, ". . . drawing on the theories of Freud, (Surrealism) calls up on the irrational world of the subconscious to reveal itself via art." Surrealist artists often spoke about "automatic rhythmic drawing." Back in the fifteenth century, Leonardo da Vinci had already suggested "the possibility of self-revelation through automatic drawing." Salvador Dali is quoted as saying: "I am the first to be surprised and often terrified by the images I see appear on my canvas." I am not so bold as to put myself in the same league as these great artists; nevertheless, there is a sense of non-self which occurs when I paint. Time ceases. Often I am surprised, when I finally take a break, to find out how many hours have actually flown by. As Picasso said when referring to the act of painting, ". . . our initiative comes from within, a propulsion which we don't control, or create." The artist, drawing from his or her inner resources, does not have a preconceived notion of what is going to fill up the canvas. It appears without thought, spontaneous. Yet it emanates from all the artist has observed, experienced, felt.

Several years ago, while pursuing a graduate real estate course, I simultaneously signed up for a painting class. One evening I was having difficulty deciding what color or line or brush stroke to use. I was appraising my needs in the painting and analyzing my options. The instructor came up behind me and said, "That is not you. You are not painting from inside. What is happening in your life right now?" Clearly, all the logical, left-brained information filling my brain during the day at my real estate course had actually shut off that part of my brain which was creative. When logic enters, creativity ceases. Sure enough, the following week, the paint flowed. The real estate course had ended.

Robert Hand declared there is "no clear boundary between ourselves and the world . . . the observer always plays a creative role in the observation." I do believe deep down within our very being is the source of creativity. It is that very source which connects to the primal rhythms of the universe. Watching a sunset, looking at the snow-covered bare limbs of a tree, peering into the opened petals of a rose, all these scenes are captured by our creative muse who stores them in our memory. Someday, they will find release in a work of art. That is, if we allow it.

Some say there are two natures involved. One is the world of nature 'out there' and

the other is the world of nature within man. I believe they are the same. "The greatness of a poem or painting is not that it portrays the thing observed or experienced, but that it portrays the artist's or the poet's vision cued off by his encounter with the reality." (Rollo May)

The full potential of the acorn is to be the mighty oak. We are constantly emerging and changing throughout our lives. The artist, in particular, has a unique advantage. Every individual can see the synthesis of him or herself and what is out there in the world. Vincent Van Gogh said it best. In 1879, he wrote: ". . . I know of no better definition of the word 'art' than this: 'art is man added to nature', nature, reality, truth, but with a significance, a conception, with a character which the artist makes evolve...." It is a joy to learn from and be surprised by what we create as the words take over or the brush depicts a surprise on canvas or musical notes form a unique, pleasant pattern. Even scientific innovation comes from the creative muse. Einstein discovered relativity in a dream.

So express your creativity. That is what I plan to do. After all, the woods would be silent if no birds sang.