

OPAA Column, June 2020, Suzan Noyes

Ars Longus, Vita Brevis. “The Arts are long, life is short.” Let’s get cracking.

What are local artists up to lately?

“My husband and I walk about four miles a day.”

“I’m cleaning all my closets and it feels great!”

“I’m trying out new art lessons, so many are offered online that I can’t resist.”

“Since I have COPD, I’ve sequestered for two months. I don’t really mind being a hermit.”

“My family members and I connect online or by phone a lot more often than usual.”

“I’m re-reading everything in my bookcase – I miss our library!”

We are all coping with restrictions. We may feel socially deprived, but this virus isn’t over yet. Fellow artists, please act safely, use gloves and masks. Protect those you know and love. Extend that care to strangers in stores, on streets and walking-paths. We’re in this together.



I have been fortunate this month to speak with Sally Cays, descendant of a long-time Peninsula family. She has stamped her very distinctive mark as painter, teacher and mentor over many years. I first discovered Sally’s watercolors in the Blue Whole Gallery some time ago while visiting this area.

Watercolor is a terrific medium. The brilliancy of colors as white paper shines through, the blend and flow, wet on wet, hard-edge, little tricks with scoring or Miskit. Salt and splatter! A skilled touch combines them all for something memorable. I appreciate Sally’s skill – the lights and darks, the compositions, which to me are one third of a painting – and of course her subject matter. Her flowers and portraits are equally impressive. When painters describe another as ‘having a gift’, it’s a weighty comment. It implies innate skill, along with a discerning eye. This ability can run in families; I found that her mother did

artistic crafts, and her sister was former president of Seattle Co-Arts while actively painting and creating in several mediums.

As a child, Sally loved to draw and had already begun using friends as subjects. Her budding art career took a little spin.

“My sister got the art lessons; I got ballet. I was always a tree in the background... not very good at ballet.”

Sally received her first oil paints at nine and her sister helpfully shared some new techniques, leading to painted portraits of people and animals. Should Sally give a young painter serious artistic advice, it would be: “Learn to *see*. Take photographs, look at light and shadow patterns. Draw, draw, draw.”

Sally chose watercolor as a primary medium when she was actively pursuing a return career in art, 1987.

Oils took too long to dry (and smelled). The paintings she responded to most in galleries were watercolors

and she preferred ultra-realism. Painter Bev Doolittle's work revealed that watercolor could display the intense colors and hard-edged realism Sally desired. It freed her from past frustrations of the late '50's, early '60's when abstract was encouraged, and realism seriously discouraged. (Even Andrew Wyeth took knocks over his realism.)

She took workshops with teachers Susan McKinnon and Arleta Pech, and still uses techniques learned from them.



Sally relies on her own photographs unless commissioned for portraits of subjects long-gone. She prefers the special relationship with a subject that her own photography provides. Therefore, her portraits, floral and still life subjects are very detailed and specific to her personal vision.

She enjoys teaching watercolor, starting with her first workshop in 1990. Sally loves teaching and it shows. "Demonstrating how to create the results painters seek excites me. It's about the techniques, how to use the medium to achieve goals." In Sally's workshops, everyone paints the same subject (which she provides) as attendees learn how to control the medium. Whatever the style or subject matter they choose in future, they'll have the tools to achieve their own personal vision.



Sally believes it's all about learning tools of the craft. "Until you can use the medium effectively, you'll be unable to communicate with it. All art is communication." (A super motto, I should borrow it.) This dovetails with her current goal of learning acrylics, which allows her to approach landscapes, cloudscapes and seascapes in a satisfying manner. "I have two standards by which I judge whether a painting I've done is good or not, 1) The painting must satisfy me, 2)

Someone else must respond to it. Otherwise it has missed the mark."

This Peninsula may have lost a dancer, but it gained a fine painter.

Given Sally's long involvement with the Blue Whole Gallery, what are her hopes for short-term future of galleries in our area? "It will be nice when we can re-open; I think that's planned for June. Commercial galleries haven't done particularly well in Sequim or Port Angeles. We may lack the kind of market that big cities have. Co-operative galleries have lower overhead and membership fees help survival rates. The Blue Whole has been here a long time – we'll survive Covid-19 and figure it's a temporary hitch in the economy."

Art is inspirational. Many parks, walking trails and beaches have re-opened. Get out and take photographs, sketch, do Plein Air. Most of us still have down-time. Self-motivate with all the extra hours we'll ever have or need. Paint, sculpt, carve, build, wire, stitch, draw. Move it or lose it! PS Still can't manage to finish that project you always thought you would? Dump it – make room for something new.