

NOYES - May OPAA column

Ars Longus, Vita Brevis. "The Arts are long, life is short." Let's get cracking.

Mother Earth had one break on April 22, less air pollution due to work at home. Peninsula gardens will burgeon with flowers and vegetables this summer. Canning products will go viral. Leave me some jars and swap photographs online of your greenest efforts.

Local population approaches stir-crazy. Many artists sequester themselves, frantically creating work they've never had time for. Others clean studios and sort supplies, a positive by-product of a viral situation. Imagine - artists with *time*.



In my old files I found years' worth of Port Gamble's dahlia gardens. (I've slavered over their dinner-plate-sized flowers.) Artistic floral photographs brought to mind a digital artist in the cooperative Port Townsend Art Gallery. I met Kay Harper months ago - on the cusp of Covid-19 - while researching oil painters. We chatted as I leafed through cards in my Latex gloves. She avidly sanitized countertops. Turned out Kay's former employers were virology research laboratories; her past background was microbiology. I admired a display of graphic red flowers on stark black ground, Kay's work. How had a scientific career evolved into this incredible photography?

Kay always appreciated the art of beautiful photography. Her husband had passed away soon after their retirement and quilting in her studio wasn't enough of a challenge. Could she learn fine photography at sixty? On impulse she bought her first DSLR; an acquaintance in her bereavement group owned the same camera. Mastering them together made the complicated new devices more fun. Kay took noncredit photography and Photoshop classes from Peninsula College and attended online webinars and workshops. CreativeLive, an extensive online photography education program based in Seattle but international in reach, was an incredible resource.

Her friend developed a photography business with newfound expertise. Kay acted as sometime assistant and second shooter for weddings and events. "My friend and I had the unexpected opportunity to attend a professional Microsoft Photography Conference in Seattle leading to a Wedding and Portrait Photographer International Conference in Las Vegas," she added. "What an amazing experience to meet and learn from worldwide professional photographers. We attended several more to sharpen our skills." Meanwhile, she devoured books and information online about fine art photography, art and design concepts.

Wedding/Event photography and Kay's fine art photography have been two concurrent threads. Her art has been the stronger focus all along. She's tried to attend at least two workshops every year in different

areas of the country focusing on garden and flower photography and has exhibited her photography for ten years in Port Townsend Art Gallery.

“It’s the creative possibilities that digital photography brings to the art that intrigues me – more than half the creative work and fun comes after I’ve taken the photograph,” says Kay.

Her finished compositions express this. Of those striking red florals with black backdrops, a theme she still explores, she says, “Think of these images as floral portraits, an elegant black dress flatters most women, that rich background flatters most flowers. I’ve photographed many other colors but reds, pinks and purples are most dramatic.”



Kay currently experiments with a light box application, using floral petals which luminesce in an all-over pattern. A departure from previous work, this technique requires more advanced camera skills and labor-intensive Photoshop skills. Possibly ninety-nine percent of any finished artwork contains manipulated, cropped, or enhanced content to produce a final image closest to that perfect vision in our heads. Is digital photography not *real* art? Kay uses the phrase “enhanced photography” to describe her craft, an introductory clue to the viewer. This involves the original photograph and the resulting image after innumerable hours spent developing her artistic vision. More than fifty percent of the creative process

utilizes a variety of software programs and tools, a Wacom tablet and pen stylus very much like a brush. Some traditional photographers might be somewhat dismissive of Kay’s craft. She finds Port Townsend Gallery visitors more interested in her final product. Kay’s art is eye-catching; they don’t question its veracity.

Her favorite photographers Harold Ross, Harold Davis and Denise Ippolito elevate photography to an art form, making beauty, composition, color and other nuances more important than pure representation of the subject matter. Exquisite florals of English photographers Mandy Disher and Jacky Parker amaze her.

On a very timely note, as a virologist and an artist, Kay has observations to share, “In the past I’ve wished for ‘time out’ from ordinary life to intensely pursue learning, photography equipment, software packages and most of all, art. It’s now a case of “be careful what you wish for.” I’ve read all I can find about Covid-19 virus. Masks being important, I’ve coordinated efforts to produce enough for my forty-member Quimper Village cohousing community. Meanwhile, both free and paid photography webinars appeared in my inbox from many past contacts. Now masks are finished; I have time for webinars, what an opportunity! My Skagit Valley flower fields workshop canceled, but our conference organizer set up video classroom sessions with the photographer/presenters. I believe some of my sense of loneliness is

alleviated by interaction with the instructor and attendees. I can ask questions and chat with others, a great alternative in these unusual times. My ‘old’ brain is positively brimming with new techniques and ideas – I take copious notes for future use.”

Kay Harper Photography

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