

Art and About....

.... and the space in-between

by Anca Colbert

It's always about a story, isn't it?

With words, images, sounds or motion, artists tell their stories and we are drawn to look, listen, observe. We feel. Sometimes we are moved. Sometimes a story truly transforms us, and that is the magic fire of art and the powerful spell it holds on our lives.

So here we are, circling around the mystery at the center of artistic creation, that space where a new reality develops, not as an imitation of an external physical world, but by an artist's distilling it into a different reality, closer to the essence of life as we feel it with the heart's center.

The "something" which emerges out of "nothing" through the miracle of artistic alchemy we call painting, poetry, cinema, music, dance. This is what moves our senses and soul.

What an artist or a writer or a musician chooses to say in their own distinctive voice is a tangible form of expression and as such carries an identifiable message. What's just as significant in their respective narratives are the open spaces, the suspended times manifested as the absence of a painted subject, the musical pause, the blank on the printed paper, the freeze of the camera's motion. There is a delicious savor to the palpable absence of the visible in this "space in-between." Words, colors and sounds are punctuated by pause and amplified by silence.

"There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time." said John Cage. "There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot."

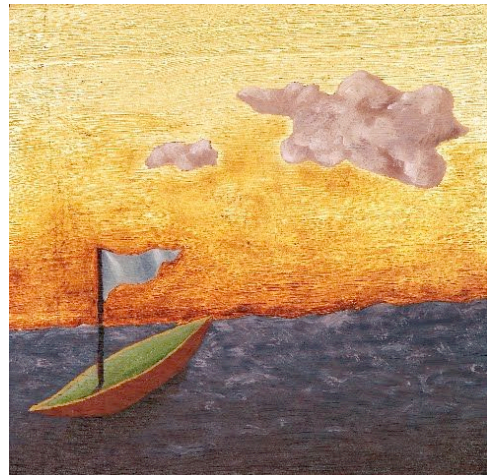
In music, silences are easier to identify, as the notes before and after them become more resonant. One of the performer's finest challenges is to *"play what's not there."* (Miles Davis)

In painting, the presence of silence and the passage of time are made apparent by composition, choices of space and colors, the introduction of abstraction within an otherwise figurative treatment of subject matter.

It's those spaces in-between which most intrigue me in the paintings of two Ojai artists whose work is illustrated here. Both Christine Brennan and Elisse Pogofsky-Harris favor an intense, yet quiet-eye approach to the narrative. Each is superbly trained in her craft and intimately familiar with the power of symbols to evoke enigmatic dreams and nightmares. They let an educated instinct guide their hand onto the canvas. It takes courage for artists to be patient (*ah! time...*), to listen to their inner voice (*oh! silence...*) and to allow images, whether brought in by light or shadow, to use them and their talent as a conduit to surface into tangible reality.



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Look at Brennan's birds and their strong shadows in/on a golden light; look at that little boat defying the horizon line; notice how Pogofsky-Harris paints in vibrant light a little girl with a white lamb on a leash, standing against all shades of darkness surrounding her on that mysterious street. The tension created by the blurred lines between dream and reality prompts the viewer to stop, reflect, and most importantly, imagine. Their stories are told in a language open for interpretation, and for that we are grateful.

In his "How Poetry Comes to Me" Gary Snyder offers illuminating insight into the adventure, risk and exhilaration of the creative impulse:

*"It comes blundering over the
Boulders at night, it stays
Frightened outside the
Range of my campfire*

*I go to meet it at the
Edge of the light.”*

That place Snyder speaks of for poetry is also for painting this space in-between, where the mystery deepens and opens the viewer to experience the transformative presence and power of art.



© Elisse Pogofsky-Harris

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