



THE QUEEN'S DOMINION, diptych. Left: "Garden of Eden " 70 x 40, oil on canvas. Right: "Tower of Babel," 70 x 40, oil on canvas. 2019

There are precious few things I have held onto from childhood, but I still own a set of Child-Craft Encyclopedias. As a post-World War II Baby Boomer I grew up watching nighttime, situational family television shows in the den with my sister where idealized, middle-class white families mastered their problems within 30 minutes, all lived happily ever after and heroes never died. But in my bedroom, laying on the floor with my set of Child-Craft Encyclopedias I could enter the world of imagination. I would read and reread rich old stories, each filled with magic and illumined with glorious illustrations. I loved the pages and pages of fairytales, rhymes, poems, folktales and historic legends. By the way, they seldom included little winged fairies nor did they always end happily ever after. Actually, they bravely explored both the good and the evil, showed examples of love and hate, sadness and happiness, generosity and greed, birth, injury, illness and even death. They traversed the difficult paths of poverty and showed us the responsibilities of having riches while not being ruled by them. They taught children that bad things might happen to good people, but that life can be tough and magnificent at the same time. Today, as an artist, I know the hours and years I spent with my nose pressed into those pages have had a major influence in shaping me into a passionate storyteller.

This diptych, "The Queens Dominion" continues one of my series of narrative paintings I call, *Cu-riouser*. If you don't read any further, I'd like you to know my inspirations for these two paintings are drawn from three sources. The first is Lewis Carol's power-hungry Queen of Hearts character in "Alice's Adventure in Wonderland." The second is Eve, who being human, was deceived by the

serpent and ate the beautiful but forbidden fruit which was able to make her wise like God. The third is my mother who has suffered her whole life with Narcissistic Sociopath Disorder, or NSD. My stories form a slightly disturbing psychological profile which allows me to express personal insights and even give current sociological commentary on the obsessively entitled female who feels she requires more, deserves more and demands more.

My goal for the theme of the diptych was to deal with the concepts of discontentment, entitlement and dominance - descriptive and fitting words for our ever growing narcissistically oriented society. Yet these same words become truly sinister descriptors for the much darker, destructive personality disorder, NSD. To be honest, I have used whimsy in this series to help defuse my personal pain in creating artworks which are a penetrating likenesses of my mother's dysfunctional behavior.

Much like the dark female archetypes depicted in the Brothers Grimm fairytales, i.e. - the wicked step-mothers in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella and Hansel and Gretel - the Queen of Hearts exemplifies the essence of malfeasance profiled in the studies of NSD. Typically these people have suffered long term, severe deprivation as children and are seemingly unable to recover. Their fight for life as a child becomes a lifelong battle. Much like the Queen of Hearts with her proclamation, "All ways are my ways," they are cold hearted, remarkably self-centered, lack empathy and are envious to the point of being vicious in matters regarding achievement, beauty, and material wealth. They believe they *deserve* the right to exploit people and situations within their environment and then dispose of them when they are finished. "Off with their head," - and there is no remorse, no guilt and no apologies under any circumstance.

I've attempted to express this power-hungry nature of the Queen of Hearts with a color palette that was predominately red, black and white. By saturating the painting's environment with red, I felt I would imbue the viewers with certain aspects of the Queen's character. While red has always been a historic marker for love and passion, it also signifies power, fire, danger, stop, the hot blooded temperament and sin.

In addition to the use of red, the black and white checkered floor is seen throughout most of my work. This is always a reference to the game of Chess and the concept of *choice*, which is a major topic in my art. For instance, where a game of cards is more susceptible to the *chance* factor, Chess entails both *strategy and choice*. Another aspect about the chessboard which plays nicely into the theme of the *Curiouser* series is that the Queen is the only female piece in the chess set and commands more power than all the other pieces, even the King.

The painting on the left side of the diptych is entitled, "Garden of Eden," my rendition of the Temptation of Eve story, but told using the self-serving Queen of Hearts. She is attired in a 1950's power-red cocktail dress which, in my mind, visually connects my mother's style and time period to this narrative by the use of this significant color, red. The dress is powerful, glamorous, and says "look at me." The whole scene teeters somewhere between the real and the surreal as the Queen is seen ascending a curious tangle of bizarre, single-eyed white roses. Though she is totally intolerant of these un-pigmented things with their porcelain pale perfection, still the sovereign makes her way through this adversarial environment, undeterred by her audience who obviously object to the invasion. Trails of ants, other insects, moths and poisonous spiders hide in the foliage. Also camouflaged, is the massive serpent who dead-eyes the intruder having tempted her with a new prize; another red butterfly will be sacrificed and added to the already burgeoning family of victims dangling about the neck of our Narcissist, imitating the shape of the heart she is missing.

The painting on the right is entitled, "Tower of Babel." Like a queen atop her own personal tower, or church pulpit, with eyes ascending up, the Queen/Goddess figure teeters inside a precariously stacked collection of unmatched teacups. The Rose-Hip teabag tag, which indicates there are no white roses allowed, stirs the Queen to make sure her roses are red. Though the roses on the wallpaper have been red all along, still that is not good enough. Immersed in the red colored tea herself, she vigorously anoints the wallpaper with her scepter-like paintbrush, causing the tea to transubstantiate into red paint. The miss-matched teacups represent the friends and family members who are stacked up so Her Highness can be elevated. While this stacking is a perverse use of the precious teacups and a danger to their own intrinsic beauty, the Queen chooses to actively ignore or even belittles the risk to the cups, diminishing their purpose and value. The greater matter is to maintain the appearance of power and control over her domain. Appeased for the moment, the Queen is pleased and comforted that her roses are freshly baptized. This is her domain! "All ways are my ways!"

I consider myself a Representational Artist, a storyteller balancing between Magical Realism and Surrealism. My process is long; it usually takes months just to develop the concept of each piece. I actively encourage my imagination by collecting significant objects and by extensive reading. As you view my entire body of work you may identify certain pieces or signifiers I've included from my personal favs, other than the Bible, like "Lord of the Rings," and "East of Eden." I have formed a rather large collection of actual objects and gadgets that enhance the narrative I'm dealing with. The list includes: vintage dress-forms, pieces of mannequins, dolls, dresses, a real beauty-pageant crown, church pulpits and pews, hardware, etc., pieces I can personally identify with and which underscore my style of storytelling.

I work with my models in photoshoots where I try to control the light as much as possible; light can be a huge part of the emotional impact of the finished piece. This is also a playtime with the vintage clothing and paraphernalia that I like to litter my work with. After the photoshoots, I take the images into Photoshop and begin to add and subtract; add the checkered flooring etc., which transform it into my unique look. I manipulate the environment until I have a reference that I'm pleased with. Most of my work over the last 20 years has been monumental in size so I usually grid up in order to transfer the image from my finished reference onto the large scale canvas. I have a practice of doing pen and ink studies of smaller areas in the paintings that are complex, like hands or eyes as studies for corrections that I want to accomplish. (Confession: I always draw the eyebrows too high and have to repaint them later!) For smaller scale paintings I do sight drawings directly onto the surface. However, I make a lot of changes to fit the situation or mood as I'm going along. I don't remember if I have ever finished a painting the same way as I conceived it in the beginning. Many of these changes take place without a drawing as I use the paint to draw on the canvas to complete the changes.

I'm an indirect painter. I paint on triple oil primed canvas, linen and birch panels and usually stain the bright white back with Burnt Sienna and a few touches of Venetian Red on the corners. Those colors are there as a mid-toned ground for my underpainting and sometimes show up as a warm illumination for the flesh in the shadow sides in the figure. On the first approach, I establish the figure using large bright bristle brushes with straight turpentine as my medium. I have a simple color palette of Raw Umber, Alizarin Crimson, Ultramarine Blue, White and Black. I try to limit myself to blocking in large areas first, but usually fail by detailing the eyes too soon. Oh well.

Each one of my series has their own color palette. While they all start the same way, after the underpainting I bring out the palette that fits the psychological and emotional aspect of each series,

i.e., I use Cadmium Red Deep to excess in the *Curiouser* series, which would not show it's face in the other series: *Cult of Beauty* or *Woods and Groves*.

My favorite medium (with good ventilation) is Copal resin, Walnut oil and Lavender Spike Oil, but I try to give the painting what it requires as I move through the process. I usually oil-out the entire canvas once during the middle of the overall painting process to revive the dryer dark areas and unify the canvas. Oiling-out a specific area also allows me to paint wet into wet. I adhere to the typical indirect method, lean to fat, thin to thick, dark to light, putting in the brightest colors and the smallest detail at the very end. I go from large bright shaped brushes to medium filberts, and then small filberts and rounds for the tiny details at the end, but I prefer a stiffer brush. When the painting is dry enough, I finish with two coats of satin varnish. I'm not fond of synthetics as they tend to look peaky in a short period of time, so I use the real stuff. A mid-sized canvas usually takes about 6 months to accomplish.

OK, not to cause anyone studio envy, but I think I have the all-time greatest studio space. Located in southern CA., next to the railroad tracks, it's part of the historic district of Old Town Orange. My studio is in a powerfully severe, 1929 poured-in-place concrete structure that was built as an Ice House for the town of Orange; next door is an old packing house for the citrus industry that the town is named after. The oranges were crated there and conveyed over to the Ice House where they could be kept cold until it was time to load them onto the trains. Our building still wears much of the necessary 1900's industrial devices that you would imagine. All this environment lends to its presence as a super conductor for creativity. For this reason it is home to several other design firms; architectural, graphic, lighting, engineering and medical.

As a woman painter I needed and went in search of a studio space that would allow me to work on my large scale pieces in a safe and comfortable environment, a place that would be easily accessible and provide a strong backdrop to support and inspire the direction I wanted to take my work. I am immensely grateful for my studio space at the Ice House where I have been producing my work for the past 16 years.

When I arrive in my studio, I shut my door, make a cup of coffee, walk around and allow my space to center me in my work. If I'm nervous about starting I will sweep the floor; btw, that usually works. The studio has high ceilings, skylights and a north-facing window and enough wall space to display my work for visitors; but mostly it's for myself. So, my artwork, the images and stories mixed with my life experiences and with what I believe to be true and important - all this comes together for me in this place that ministers to my creative heart, enables me to continue to grow as an artist and produce my best work.

If you're ever in Orange, CA.....

Thank you for reading my response to the interview questions posed to me by Michael Pearce for TRAC2019. While this will be the fourth TRAC I've attended, it will be my first time participating as a featured speaker. Thank you Michael. It's an honor.