

Suzette's Art Blog

Ramblings & Musings on Art and Life

2008

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January 1, 2008

JUST DO IT!!

January 1st. A time to rethink, reorganize, regroup; a time to take care of business, make changes, make plans, resolutions. After getting through the Christmas holidays and too much eating & drinking, and too little physical activity, it's time to open the windows and let the fresh air blow through, metaphorically speaking.

In the past couple of months, I've complained of being blocked, of lacking inspiration and direction in my work. I'm going to get over that block by making changes. I'm going to start working in series, picking a theme and exploring that theme with several paintings, thereby developing more continuity in the work. I'm also going to change my work habits. I believe that change is achieved by changing our actions. If we keep doing the same thing, we keep getting the same results, therefore: change actions, get different (hopefully better) results.

Sometimes, too much time is spent thinking about what we want to do, what we should do, looking for 'THE' best thing to do, and often, there is no best thing to do. Just make a decision and go for it. Some action is better than no action. If it doesn't turn out to be the best action, then make changes when that becomes apparent, but at least you will have gotten started.

The thing is, nothing ever gets accomplished by just thinking about it. Planning is great, but you actually have to get off your bum and do it. So this is a great time to make that choice.

Stop thinking about it; JUST DO IT!

My wish for you this year is that when you come to the end of the year and look back, you can say 'I did it'.

"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." (Annie Dillard)

Suzette

PS: I've added the text of my 2007 blog entries as well as my 2008 printable art

calendar (see right sidebar). Since the calendar takes up a lot of my available space, I will only leave it up for the month of January. After that, you can email me and I'll be happy to send it to you by email.

January 11, 2008

Bamboo - the Way of the Future

I recently purchased a couple of pairs of socks made from bamboo fibre. I didn't realize there was such a thing. I found them to be really soft and comfy, like a fine wool, except they don't shrink in the wash; better than wool.

This left me thinking about bamboo. According to Wikipedia, bamboo is very strong, extremely versatile, and a wonderful renewable resource. Bamboo grows very quickly; some of the larger varieties can grow as much as a meter per day.

Bamboo can be used in construction; when treated, it forms a very hard wood which is both lightweight and exceptionally durable. It can be used for floors, furniture, canoes, musical instruments; its uses are almost unlimited. It can be carved for decorative work. The fiber can be used to make paper, yarns and fabric. Bamboo fabric is notable for its soft feel and claims of natural antibacterial properties. And let's not forget, bamboo is a staple in Asian cuisine. How much more versatile could it be?

Consider the state of our environment and the onset of global warming; consider the role that trees play in keeping our air clean and how many millions of trees are cut down each year for construction and the making of paper and other goods; it's an easy conclusion that bamboo represents the solution to the cutting down of trees. We must grow and use bamboo as our main source of wood and stop cutting down our forests.

And on the subject of conservation, we all need to make recycling a priority. Reduce, reuse and recycle. That's the motto we need to live by. We must all do our part. Every little bit counts.

"I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker." (Helen Keller)

Suzette

January 20, 2008

Something Useful

Today I'd like to pass on a few links that I have found to be extremely useful. You might enjoy them too.

For help and information on 'the business side of art', check out www.artbizcoach.com

. Alyson Stanfield publishes a weekly newsletter chockful of useful information and advice. She wants to help artists promote themselves and sell their art. She also publishes a blog at www.artbizblog.com . I recommend you sign up for her newsletter.

If you'd like to explore an artist community, try www.wetcanvas.com . There are numerous articles on just about every subject related to art making. It is a huge site. But one of the best features is the 'discussion forums'. You'll find those at www.wetcanvas.com/forums . There, artists talk to one another by posting questions or comments, to which other artists reply. The forums are organized by subject, from general discussions about art, to the business of art, to specific discussions by medium, or genre. It's an incredible resource and a nice way to make online friends.

Another one you might want to try is www.emptyeasel.com . It also has a large number of articles, painting tips, reviews, etc. This one is a little harder to navigate, so I suggest you sign up for the weekly newsletter which tells you what articles will be published during the week, and it also points you to last week's articles. With each article, you get links to previous related articles. Some nice information there.

Of course, I'm sure I don't have to mention Robert Genn's twice-weekly newsletter which is received by thousands and thousands of artists worldwide. Twice a week, Robert writes on a variety of topics and publishes a selection of replies received from viewers. There's also the opportunity to add your own comments directly on the site. Makes for very interesting reading. Well worth signing up for at www.painterskeys.com .

*Rest not! Life is sweeping by;
Go dare before you die.
Something mighty and sublime,
Leave behind to conquer time.* (Johann W. von Goethe)

Suzette

February 1, 2008

Getting Older

Getting older is something you think will never happen to you, and then one day you wake up, and whammo, you realize you're getting old. You look at yourself in the mirror and realize that your skin is sinking in on itself, forming deep gorges and lines; your hair is getting thinner (yes, it happens to women too!); your body tries to compensate for the thin hair by growing extra ones on your chin; and your body, well, let's just say that the silhouette you see in the mirror belongs to your mother, not you.

However, I've discovered that getting older comes with counter benefits. For example: in the morning, I have trouble putting on my eye make up because I can't see very well without my glasses. The counter benefit is that my eyelids are so droopy that they hide all the eye makeup anyway so you can't see what a poor job I've done. See? Counter

benefit: a benefit that offsets a problem.

My memory is getting worse all the time (I think; I seem to remember thinking that a few times....). My attention span is shorter than a two-year-old's. I'm in the living room, I think of something I need in the kitchen. By the time I get to the kitchen, I can't remember what it was that I wanted. I have to go back to the living room and then I remember what it is and have to go to the kitchen again. The counter benefit here is that I get extra exercise which I really need anyway.

I'll grant you, there are other things in life that have counter benefits that have nothing to do with old age. Pets for example. My cat has long thick hair. He requires regular brushing, and even at that, he leaves little clumps of hair all over the carpet, or worse, hairballs. So he requires a lot of care, can be annoying, but (counter benefit) he keeps me company and I love him. (Actually, now that I think about it, it's the same thing with husbands.)

I am reminded of the words of fellow artist and blogger, Charlotte Madison:
"There was in her, one last bloom of her beauty, brought forth by the joy of freedom."

All I can hope is that there is also in me a last bloom of beauty brought forth by the freedom which comes with getting older and not caring so much what other people think, and finally being able to do exactly what I want. It's grand.

Suzette

February 11, 2008

Abundance

We, in the western societies, live in a world of abundance. We have so much. So many goods, so many choices; too much sometimes. Whenever we see something we like, even if we can afford to buy it, we ask "do I really need another XXX, what will I do with it, where will I put it". So we have to make choices. When I shop, when I visit art studios or art festivals, I see a lot of things that I like but I don't buy everything. Sometimes I buy things that I put away when I get home and they stay put away for months, or years. I clearly didn't need to buy them, and I tell myself that next time, I will not buy things I don't need.

With this in mind, I am reminded that whenever I'm doing a show and find myself wishing that I would sell more, I often wonder why those people who said such nice things about a certain painting, didn't buy it in the end. When they clearly loved the painting, why did they walk away? Perhaps, like me, they are asking themselves whether they really need another XXX.

There's more to selling than making a product that people like. There's a psychology of connecting with buyers in a way that they happily part with their money. Unfortunately, few of us know or understand this psychology. I wish I knew how it all

works, but sadly the answers elude me.

And why is it so important to an artist to sell? How does an artist stop caring about selling? For me, selling is validation. I don't paint to sell, but selling is the acknowledgment that the work has value. When someone is willing to part with their money, it speaks louder than any words, it means more than 'what a beautiful painting', or 'I just love this work' (even though such comments are nice too). It's saying, 'I don't really need another XXX, but I WANT it'.

Is it wrong to attach so much importance to the selling part of art making? Is an artist supposed to feel fulfilled simply by creating the art? Clearly, the rewards of creating the work are substantial enough to keep most of us going, even while sales are low; if they weren't, there would be a lot fewer artists around. But selling is 'outside, impartial' confirmation. And it feels good.

*"Half the battle is selling music, not singing it. It's the image, not what you sing."
(Rod Stewart)*

Your comments are always welcome.

Suzette

February 21, 2008

Advertising

Every once in a while, I see something that leads me to ask myself, is this for real or is this somebody's idea of a bad joke.

I've been seeing ads on TV lately for 'new Diamond Shaped Shreddies'. The commercial shows the assembly line with the square ones, and all of a sudden, there are some diamond shaped ones, and everyone pretends that they're a different shape and not just the same ones tilted sideways. It's cute. And apparently, you can actually buy boxes of regular shreddies, as well as boxes of 'new diamond shaped shreddies'.

I suppose, in the world of marketing, that is not stupid but genius. It's meant to be humorous and to attract a lot of attention, and ultimately, to increase sales. And it will probably work. I wonder if there are really people out there who will not see this for what it is and truly think they're getting something new when they buy the diamond shaped ones? The mind boggles, doesn't it?

Another example of stupid/genius marketing: billboards have been appearing nationwide with captions like these: 'When Amy started to think for herself, we knew we had to nip it in the bud, with Obay'; and 'My son had ideas of his own; Obay put a stop to that'. The ad shows a bottle of pills, and at the bottom of the billboard, in small print: 'from the makers of 'WhyBecauseISaidSo!'. This one is apparently a teaser campaign; the product has not yet been unveiled, the campaign is to generate interest

ahead of time. Crazy like a fox, right? I wonder how many people will line up to get this wonder drug that makes children behave and listen to their parents.

Advertising is big business. Convincing people to see things your way and buy your product, that's what drives the economy, isn't it? Do you ever wonder if we're being manipulated, brain-washed even, by all this advertising? Of course we are. Is it doing any harm? I'm not sure but I would say, probably, in some cases, it can.

Comments always welcome.

Suzette

"You need to be the best or you need to be different." (author unknown)

March 1, 2008

Snobbery

I recently heard, on a decorating show (House & Home), the designers talking about the minimalist style of decorating. One of them said: "Everybody's doing minimalism; it's so common now, so middle class, you don't want to do that anymore if you want to be different".

How typical. For the longest time, they were telling us that minimalism was the way to go. Now that many people have believed them and adopted the style, it's no longer good. It's not good any more because so many have adopted it. In other words, it's no longer elitist, it's common, and therefore not good enough any more.

For a style of decorating, or whatever, to fall out of favour because people are getting tired of it, that I can understand. But to have that style shunned by the experts because it's become too popular, well to me, that pure snobbery. And I hate snobbery.

I can see the same thing applying in art. The experts will tell you that a certain style is 'in', and that another is passé. And when that style becomes popular, it too will become passé and will be replaced by another as the new favourite. This kind of thing drives me crazy. It's elitist, it's a putdown, it's nonsense.

Here's a comment I saw recently on Robert Genn's website: *"Of interest and concern to observant realists is the apparent pervasive amateurism of much of modern art."*
(Robert Genn)

I have to admit that I was really taken aback by this comment. He is saying that much of modern art is amateurish. That's quite a judgment to make, let alone to do so in a public forum. Another example of snobbery??

How can any one person be qualified to make such a judgment? Why do we let the so-called experts dictate what is in or not, or what is good, or what is significant or

meaningful? How do they achieve this level of credibility, if not because people let them, and believe them, and follow their advice, like lemmings plunging into the sea. How sad. How ridiculous.

*"The trouble is, we've been taught what to see and how to render what we see."
(Pablo Picasso)*

Your comments are always welcome.

Suzette

March 10, 2008

Juried Shows

Have you ever wondered about juried shows? Do they really mean anything? Does being accepted or rejected in a juried show say anything about the quality of your work?

Over the last several years, I have had the chance to be involved in many juried shows through my association with an art club, and an art gallery; I was lucky enough to have had the experience of observing jurors while in the process of selecting works for a show on a couple of occasions. I was able to see all the paintings that were entered, I saw what got accepted and what got declined, and then watched while paintings were selected for awards. I was usually left scratching my head. In every show, works that I thought worthy got declined and works that I found lacking got accepted, and on occasion, the awards given completely baffled me.

There is no question in my mind that jurying is a completely subjective process. I myself have had the experience of having a work rejected in one show only to go on to win an award in another show. The bottom line is that the decision of the jurors is a personal one, based on personal criteria, personal interpretation, personal taste, personal opinion.

So if that's the case, why then do we place such value on juried shows? It seems to me like the whole process is just one big crap shoot. If you can't trust the decision of the jurors to mean that the work is good, or not, then what can be learned by entering these shows, and do repeated rejections not tend to discourage artists who are not yet confident in themselves and their work?

The problem that I see is that artists may have a tendency to want to 'fit in' with their work in order to be accepted in shows. To do that, they may end up giving up their own truth, their own vision, in their attempt to please the jurors. It's a delicate line to walk, balancing being true to your vision with a desire to improve your skills and gain acceptance. Perhaps a personal critique from an artist you know and trust, would be a better learning experience. In the end, we must all aspire to stay true to ourselves and develop on our own terms.

"As all evaluation systems are suspect, there's another way for creative people to approach the game. Pay no attention to what anybody thinks. Set your own standards. Paddle your own canoe. This includes not putting yourself at the mercy of kangaroo courts. Simply become your own jury and prize-giver. The real prize comes to the artist when the work is made, and if it's truly worthy and anyone wants to vote for it down the line, maybe they'll track you down." (Robert Genn)

Suzette

March 21, 2008

Laughter

In the last few weeks, I've had the pleasure of going to the theatre to see 2 comedic performances well worth seeing. Both were extremely funny; I can't remember when I've had so much fun and laughed so hard.

One was about the differences in the way that men and women see, think and act. The other was about the foibles of every day life when you're middle-aged or beyond. Both topics provided plenty to laugh about as you can well imagine. For the most part, it was funny because it was so true, and every joke just seemed to hit the nail right on the head but in such a way that we could laugh at it, and at ourselves at the same time.

On my way home from the last one, it dawned on me that being with other people really enhances the experience. Hearing everyone else laugh, especially those who laughed particularly loud or had a weird laugh, just made everything even funnier. The jokes were getting funnier and funnier as the evening went on, and I'm sure part of this was the communal experience of shared laughter, not just the jokes.

Laughter feels good. Laughter can ease the pain or stress of life, it can lighten the load from your shoulders. Best of all, laughter is contagious and feels even better when shared with friends or loved ones. I can't tell you where to find that which will make you laugh, I suppose it's different for everyone. But I can recommend you look for it, be open to it. Try to see the funny side of every day events; instead of getting frustrated sometimes, try laughing at the situation instead. I guarantee you'll feel better. You'll be happier and a much nicer person to be around. There's nothing like laughter, it's the second best thing in the world to make you feel good.

"The more I live, the more I think that humor is the saving sense." (Jacob August Riis)

Your comments always welcome.

Suzette

April 1, 2008

Soul

Some people think that the sign of a good painting is how closely it resembles that which it portrays. In other words, realism. Photo-realism for some is the ultimate form of painting.

Realism and photo-realism both require extremely good skills to be able to accurately depict the subject at hand. The artist must be able to carefully observe and 'really see' the subject to discover all the colours that are hidden from the casual observer. The artist must then be able to translate what he sees to the painting. Good technical skills are essential and will result in a very nice painting indeed.

But, where is the soul? Where is that flash of inspiration in how the colours are interpreted and rendered? Where is that brilliant touch of surprising colour that catches your eye and makes you want to linger and enjoy it time and time again?

For the true realist, if that bit of brilliant colour isn't on the scene, it won't go in the painting. The real artist will make it up; he will invent special highlights, or colourful shadows, to enhance the painting. He will change colours at will if it best serves the work. He will inject the soul, his soul, into that painting.

Abstract artists don't even need a scene to depict. They will make up an arrangement of shapes and colours in such a way as to make them sing; these arrangements will connect with viewers, and speak to them and make them feel.

So for my money, art is not necessarily about accurate rendition but rather, it's about connection and it's about feeling, for yourself and for others who view the work. And while it's possible to impart those qualities in realistic works, it doesn't happen automatically. At some point in the painting process, the artist must forget about duplicating what he sees and start injecting his own sense of the scene into the work, if he wants the work to have impact.

"Every true artist has been inspired more by the beauty of lines and color and the relationships between them, than by the concrete subject of the picture." (Piet Mondrian)

Comments always welcome.

Suzette

April 11, 2008

Hugs & Kisses

When I was growing up, it seems to me that we weren't hugging and kissing each other all the time. Nowadays, it's quite common, when greeting or saying goodbye, to kiss on the cheek, or give a small hug. That's a wonderful custom of course, but until you get

used to it, it can be awkward. For the cheek kiss, do you go to the right, or to the left? Have you ever gotten it wrong and squished noses and lips instead? And just when I get used to it, I go to Montreal for a visit, and there, it's both cheeks, but again, it is left/right, or right/left?

Then there's the social hug. In my book, a hug is a really sincere affair, body contact, arms wrapped around the person's shoulders or neck; it really says I've missed you and I'm happy to see you. But the social hug is kind of half-hug; it doesn't quite 'hold' the person. You put an arm, maybe two, on the person's shoulders or just behind, move forward until you're barely touching, and then release. Like the cheek kiss, it's a way to say Hello, not much more. But here too, do you go to the right or to the left, and do you do a cheek kiss at the same time, or is that a completely different operation? And how do you know which one to do, the kiss or the hug? What if you go for the hug and the other person goes for the kiss? He or she is going to end up kissing your hair.

I don't know why I find this awkward, but I do. For most of my life, I've never been a hugger and kisser, well except for my husbands, children and grandchildren of course; them, I like to kiss a lot. So I don't know why I find all this awkward but I do. I think I'm finally getting it. I think it's to the left for both the cheek kiss and the half hug, my left that is, their right. And I find that if you do it with confidence, it all works out; as you lean in to the left with only your head, that signifies the cheek kiss; if the arms are up, that signifies the hug. If the other person is in sink, the operation is perfect.

So why did I bring this up today? Don't know. Just seemed like a good idea at the time. But more importantly, am I the only one feeling like this?

'They invented hugs to let people know you love them without saying anything.' (Bill Keane)

Suzette

April 21, 2008

Open Studio

This coming weekend, April 26 and 27, I will be participating in an open studio event, part of the Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows Art Studio Tour. Thirty artists and artisans, throughout Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, will be participating. If you'd like more information, full details and a map are available on the 'tour's website'.

What is an open studio event?

During an open studio, an artist opens up his studio to visitors; it's like an open house with the focus being on art. There is usually a lot of art to be seen (and purchased). There is often some work in progress, allowing you to see how the artist works and the different stages that a work goes through from beginning to end. If you're lucky, the artist may even demonstrate some of his techniques.

How is that different from an art show?

A studio visit is a lot less formal, and much more personal than an art show. You are seeing the artist in his element, where he works, and often also lives. You can talk to him, ask questions, and perhaps watch him work. You can really make a connection with your favourite artist and his work becomes much more meaningful to you.

From the artist's point of view, what are the benefits of the open studio?

For the artist, it's a chance to get to know your viewers and collectors in a personal way. Again, it's being able to make that personal connection and establish a relationship. It's an opportunity to explain and perhaps demonstrate your work. It's a way to show your latest work and give your regular customers a chance to be first at seeing and purchasing your work.

Benefits all around!

All in all, it's a great way to see a lot of art and meet several artists. It's a chance to find hand-made, one-of-a-kind items, like jewellery, or pottery. It's a fun way to spend an afternoon or two. In this day and age, there's nothing like looking at original works and hand-made artifacts; works that were made right here at home, by the hand of the artist himself and not by machines or assembly line processes or sweat shops in the third world.

You are all invited to visit my studio this weekend and I hope to see and meet a lot of you.

"There's something very beautiful taking place: The relentless march of Hi Tech seems to bring out the need in some individuals to experience the spiritual, the natural world, and the magnificence of the truly handmade." (Robert Genn)

Suzette

May 1, 2008

The Artist Statement

Today, I'd like to talk about the artist statement. There seems to be a lot of confusion between a biography, a CV (curriculum vitae), and an artist statement. Furthermore, how do you make your biography, or artist statement, interesting and readable.

I have read some artist statements that were nothing but gobbledygook; 'artspeak' as I like to call it. The words were proper words, the sentences were properly constructed, but I couldn't, for the life of me, figure out what the heck they were talking about. They came across as pretentious and meaningless. Those kinds of statements do nothing to endear artists to the general population; just the opposite, they create an elitist rarified atmosphere where the average person does not feel welcome. Not exactly what one wants to achieve with their statement.

First of all, let's talk about the difference between the statement and the biography. The

main difference is this: the biography is about the artist, the statement is about the work.

BIOGRAPHY

The biography sets out where the artist is from, the educational background, exhibitions, affiliations, awards, and so on. This can include why you paint and what you hope to achieve, in a general way. The biography should be a one or two-page document. It should be short and concise, but informative and up-to-date. Details of your childhood experiences with art are not really relevant. Do talk about what led you to paint (or whatever your art form is), but keep it current and interesting, and please, use regular, ordinary language.

CV

The CV is an expanded biography. It can be the same as your biography but with more details of your various exhibitions, publications, collections, etc. It is more like a resume and should be more business-like in format and appearance, making use of point-form lists where appropriate.

ARTIST STATEMENT

The artist statement is about the work. It can be a general-purpose statement that relates to all your work, or it can be a specific-purpose statement that relates only to part of your work. For example, if you are applying for a show at a gallery, you would be presenting a specific body of work, so for that purpose, the statement would pertain only to this specific body of work. Your artist statement should set out why you produce the work, what led you to making this work, what the work means or represents, and how it is relevant to viewers, or to society as a whole.

COMBINED STATEMENT

For most of us, however, the most versatile and convenient way to impart our information is to combine both the biography and the statement. In other words, talk about both yourself and your work. This combined statement however should remain short and to the point. Again, keep it current and interesting, and hopefully informative and meaningful. Also, update your statement often. Change it all the time. That will keep it from getting stagnant and obsolete.

"Art is more than a product of your efforts – it should be about feeling, life, attitude, soul." (Sergei Bongart)

Your comments are always welcome.

Suzette

May 11, 2008

More 'Is It Art?'

I recently came across information about artist Damien Hirst. I had never heard of him before but he is apparently a renowned artist worldwide. His art consists of

installations, sculptures, paintings and drawings. Some of his most famous works include:

- The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living (shark in formaldehyde);
- Mother and Child Divided (a cow and a calf sliced in half in formaldehyde);
- The Martyrdom of Saint James the Lesser, (medical objects in a glass cabinet with blood (?) dripping down the glass panels).

Hirst is also known for his paintings, such as his 'Butterfly Paintings' (actual butterflies suspended in paint) or Amazing Revelations, where he arranged thousands of butterfly wings in a mandala-like pattern. Other paintings he is known for are his 'spin' paintings, made on a spinning circular surface, and 'spot' paintings, which are rows of randomly-coloured circles.

WhiteCube.Com says that Hirst explores the uncertainty at the core of human experience; love, life, death, loyalty and betrayal through unexpected and unconventional media.... His works recast fundamental questions concerning the meaning of life and the fragility of biological existence. *(really?? dead animals in fluid, butterflies in paint, spots on a canvas?? Is it me, or is this crazy?? and where is the Art??).*

Here's another bit of information about his animals in formaldehyde: after a few years, the animals actually start to rot and have to be replaced. So another shark has to be found, or another cow and calf have to be killed and sliced in half to replace the rotting ones.

So, here I am, a small time painter, who loves to sell the occasional painting, and wonders why it is so difficult to attract viewers and buyers at shows, to gain just a bit of interest and enthusiasm from the general population which seems far more interested in hockey or football than paintings, or sculptures, or carvings. And then I read a story like this where the man puts dead animals in liquid and displays them in public and who last year sold one of his works for 50 million pounds (about a hundred million dollars).

Well, I guess we don't live in the same world. In my world, you need to learn some real skills, you need to practice and practice and practice, and if you work hard and persevere, and if you're a bit lucky, then maybe, just maybe, you will one day be able to produce some decent work, and if you're luckier still, you might be able to sell a few of them for a few hundred dollars. Definitely not living in the same world.

You can see pictures of Hirst's works at

<http://images.google.com/images?q=Damien+Hirst&rls=com.microsoft:en-us:IE-SearchBox&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&sourceid=ie7&rlz=117ADBF&um=1>.

For more information, check out http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damien_Hirst, or <http://www.whitecube.com/artists/hirst/>.

“Did you ever get the feeling that the world was a tuxedo and you were a pair of brown shoes?” (comedian George Gobel)

Suzette

May 21, 2008

Teaching Children

What is the most important thing we should be teaching our kids? In school, they learn to read and write (at least I hope they still teach that in school) as well as a host of other useful things. At home, they're supposed to learn proper manners and behaviour. And in this process of teaching them, we establish a lot of rules which the kids have to follow, and if we're doing the job right, not following the rules brings about some negative consequences. Good system, right?

But are we teaching our children to think for themselves? Instead of teaching them to conform and to follow rules, should we not be teaching them to think independently, to question authority, and to form their own opinions, to learn how to make decisions and to live with the consequences of those decisions.

Sounds like chaos, doesn't it? Letting kids make their own choices and decisions. That would require us to give our children a strong base of information and to teach them how to evaluate that information. Then we would have to trust them to make reasonable, responsible decisions. I know what I'm saying, I know how much work that would be and what an immense commitment it would take on the part of parents and teachers. But doesn't it sound like a worthy goal? We should at the very least, try to aim for that goal, at least to some degree. Would a world with fewer rules and more responsibility, not be a better world?

When I was raising my children, I knew that what I wanted was for them to grow up self confident, well-adjusted, happy with who they were, able to navigate the difficult roads of life and to find their way. Self-confident, self-sufficient, responsible, kind and loving. That's what I wanted for them. If I was doing it again today, my goals would be the same. I might be wiser about the whole thing, but my goals for them would be unchanged.

“Let the views of others educate and inform you, but let your decisions be a product of your own conclusions.” (Jim Rohn)

Comments always welcome.

Suzette

June 1, 2008

Pricing Your Art - Part 1

One of the things that I've always found difficult to do (and I know that many other artists feel the same way) is pricing your art for sale; it is definitely one of the trickier things an artist has to do. There are so many things to take into consideration. You want to recover the cost of your materials and have something left over for your time, but you also have to consider what the market will bear, in other words, what the buyers are willing to pay. You need to look at what other artists in your area, who are at the same stage of their careers and producing similar work, are charging. Then, you have to make a decision as to where you want your prices to be, either similar, lower or higher. There are valid reasons to be either lower or higher.

Here's some food for thought on the subject.

Is the perception of value influenced by the price? By that I mean, do buyers think that a higher priced painting is WORTH more than a lower priced one? And if they do, does it matter to them? What about free items? If you give something away for free, is there not a perception that the item is not worth much to begin with?

I believe that many buyers think that higher priced items are worth more but that does not necessarily mean that they won't buy the cheaper one anyway. It depends on their motivation for buying in the first place. Some buyers like to feel they got a bargain; they're looking for the best price. Some like to feel they bought something valuable; they will be happy to pay a high price for something they like. And then there are those who will buy the one they love, no matter the price, because they are buying out of love.

Unfortunately, it really does not matter how many hours you laboured over a painting, how good you think it is, how much you love it; ultimately, it is worth only what someone will pay for it. That is what determines value, what the buyer is willing to pay.

So how do you price your art? You need to determine what's important to you. Would you rather sell more at a lower price, or less at a higher price? Do you just want to paint because you enjoy it, and selling feels good and allows you to pay for supplies? Or do you want to build a serious career, be in galleries, museums? Then, perception of value is important and higher prices may serve your purposes better. Perhaps your goal is somewhere between the two; that will also help determine where your prices should be.

Next time, I'll talk about other factors to think about when it comes to pricing art.

Share your thoughts on this by posting a comment.

Suzette

"Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." (Seneca, 60 A.D.)

June 12, 2008

Pricing Your Art - Part 2

More Things to Think about in Pricing Your Art:

- Check what other artists are charging in your area, whose work is comparable to yours in style, subject matter, expertise, etc. and decide where you want your prices to be in relation to theirs.
- Test prices; start low and increase them over time, based on how sales are; if you start too high, it will be difficult to go back down and doing so will alienate your existing customers.
- Prices should be the same no matter where the work sells - consistency is important to previous buyers.
- Never adjust your price up or down because of the commission charged by a gallery or show organizer. Your price needs to be constant and must include such commissions. To do otherwise would be unfairly undercutting your galleries.
- Prices can go up over time, but should never go down - that would alienate your collectors.
- There are very good reasons to have a firm price structure, such as pricing by the square inch, or according to a sliding scale, and not according to how much you like the piece.
- Consider pricing according to size, on a sliding scale, and let that price be for unframed work; then, add the cost of framing or any other special costs. That will allow for differences in the cost of framing.
- Is it OK to add a premium to special paintings, ones that have turned out particularly well, or are different than your usual, or have won awards? Be prepared to justify any premiums added to the regular price.
- Do you know what to do when a buyer asks for a discount (and what are the consequences of agreeing to give a discount)?
- What people will pay is not necessarily related to what they can afford to pay; there are people who can afford to pay the high price but routinely ask for discounts; they don't feel good about a purchase unless they think they got a 'deal'.
- Just because they ask for a discount doesn't mean they are not willing to pay the full asking price, they're just taking a chance that you might be willing to charge them less.
- There are probably circumstances where discounts might be appropriate, like repeat customers, or quantity purchases. Think about it in advance and formulate a policy.

- Be prepared to answer the question about the discount so that you are not taken by surprise and end up doing something you might regret later.
- Don't be afraid of losing a sale because you refuse to give a discount; customers willing to pay full price often end up being your best, most loyal, customers.
- Act in a professional manner at all times; that is the best way to safeguard your reputation.

Comments always welcome.

Suzette

"The creative life requires a steady progression of experimentation and discovery."
(Robert Genn)

June 21, 2008

How Art Affects Our Lives

I read recently (on GlobeandMail.com, article by Josh Wingrove, June 9, 2008) that Vancouver and Montreal have been declared to be among the 25 most livable cities in the world. They were the only Canadian cities to make the list. Vancouver was 8th and Montreal 16th.

Various reasons were given why each city made the list. What interested me the most was that one of those reasons was their artistic life. Montreal was called "Canada's cultural capital" with credit given for its strong arts community. The study did not look at high-profile cities such as London, Rome and New York, but rather at "smaller, user-friendly cities with vibrant arts scenes, plenty of parks and a friendly face."

It came as a big surprise to me that a strong arts community is an important factor in making a wonderful place to live. Although I totally agree, I always thought that, of all the subjects taught in schools, the arts were considered 'extras', fun stuff to take but not really that educational, and not subjects that you help you find a job after graduation. At least, that's how it was when I was going to school.

That leads me to ask 'what is the value of art in general, and in the evolution of the species, and in history?'. Does our art not reflect who we are, and will looking back at a people's art not reveal who they were, what they valued and how they evolved?

But is art more than a historical record? Of course it is. Whether we're talking about music, paintings, a beautiful sculpture, doesn't matter. Art gives us joy, elevates our spirit, moves and inspires us and can take us out of every-day tediousness and allow us to soar, even if temporarily. Art also can make a social comment, build awareness, reach the subconscious.

This is what I think: art elevates us to a point where life is more than survival (working, eating, procreating, ...). Art brings beautiful emotions into our lives. It allows us to be lifted above survival, it allows us to feel, think, question. In short, it enriches our lives beyond the necessities.

"All art, whether it pleases us or not, helps to add color, excitement, joy or sadness, and most often, a sense of awe to our life's experience." (Henry O. Dormann)

Comments always welcome.

Suzette

July 1, 2008

How Art Affects Our Lives - Part 2

In my last blog, I talked about the effect that art has on our lives. Coincidentally, I just came across a study that ties right in with this topic. It shows that artists are generally happier and their life satisfaction is greater than the general population as they age. Making art, and the satisfaction that comes with that, has a lot to do with it.

(The study is from the Research for Arts and Culture and is called: "Above Ground: Information on Artists III - Special Focus New York City Aging Artists". You can view this study through their website. The study was limited to aging artists living in New York City, but I believe the findings are applicable to artists living anywhere.)

The following is taken directly from their report:

"Psychological models of 'successful aging' have highlighted evidence of positive personal growth, creativity, self-efficacy, autonomy, independence, effective coping strategies, sense of purpose, self-acceptance and self-worth. Artists, as our study makes abundantly clear, are engaged in all of these indicators, especially with their art as a barometer."

It would seem that artists love their work so much that they don't want to retire from it. They get great satisfaction from making art. They tend to have better-than-average social networks which contributes to their general well-being, even as they age. Interestingly, it seems that women give more support and experience greater benefits from their social networks than men.

I found this study interesting because, personally, I have to agree that the making of art and all of the ancillary activities that go along with it, totally enrich my life and give it purpose, especially at this stage of my life.

Suzette

"The arts are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow." (Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.)

July 17, 2008

The \$2,500 Banana

I never stop to marvel (or snicker) at what some people will do and call art. Here's another story, the story of the \$2,500 banana (from a story by Oliver Moore in the Globe and Mail, July 2, 2008).

A gallery in Halifax is displaying a work entitled 'Banana' with a price tag of \$ 2,500. The work consists of, you guessed it, a banana. A slightly green banana. On the tag identifying the work is a blue dot, which means that one or more buyers have put a hold on the work. In this case, there are 2 such buyers.

The work is by artist Michael Fernandes. The banana is changed every day and each time, it is replaced with a slightly greener banana. The artist is 'gradually reversing the ripening process'. He says that the work is not actually the banana; the process is what's important. The buyer will be paying for the concept and will receive photos documenting the project. No tangible piece of art will trade hands.

One of the bananas was stolen not long after the exhibition started, and one was swapped for an apple. I guess some people see the humour in this situation.

The artist wanted to price the work at \$15,000 but the gallery wanted it priced more reasonably and they agreed on \$2,500.

Well, what can I add to this story? I actually find this one funny. It's a concept, an idea. It does not require drawing or painting or sculpting skills; nope, nada. Just an idea. Well, of course, you have to find a gallery actually interested in showing such a piece of work. I suspect that reputation and public recognition have something to do with this part. I strongly suspect that, had I approached galleries with a similar idea, I would have been laughed out of the place.

Hope you're having a great summer.

Suzette

"The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about." (Oscar Wilde)

August 11, 2008

Summer Update

I hope everyone is having a great summer.

I've been remiss in making my blog entries every 10 days as I usually do. My summer's been really busy so far, with 3 weekend shows in a row, followed by a trip to Montreal and Quebec Cities.

I've just returned from my trip where I visited with family and attended a family reunion with 100 attendees. It's always nice to renew ties with family members whom you seldom see otherwise.

Next on the horizon is preparing my new studio (painting and outfitting, etc.) so I can move in shortly. I have rented some studio space in a new gallery that will open shortly in Maple Ridge. This new gallery will consist of 5 or 6 artist studios, a large gallery space and lots of general areas to hang paintings. We will be open officially as of September 1st, with a grand opening some time in September or October; the date has not yet been set.

So, it's a very exciting time for me, but I promise to return to my usual blog writing schedule soon.

Suzette

"To accomplish great things, we must dream as well as act." (Anatole France) French novelist (1844 - 1924)

"To accomplish great things, we must act as well as dream". (Suzette Fram)

Sept. 3, 2008

Doing Work on Commission

Many artists do work on commission routinely. If you haven't done commission work but have been thinking about it, there are some things you should consider before you do.

How much control will the client have in determining the direction of the work? Will you do preliminary drawings for the client's approval? Will you allow the client to check in on the work while it's still in progress, and if so, when? At the halfway mark perhaps, or maybe when the work is one third complete, and again when it's two thirds complete? Will you be prepared to make changes at the client's request, and at what stage will you be willing to do that? Will you make changes once the work is finished?

You will have to agree on the size and the price before any work is started. You should agree on what the work will consist of and whether preliminary drawings will be done. You should also agree on a price structure in case changes are requested that were not part of the original plan. You should also agree on a time table; be sure to allow yourself plenty of time to complete the work.

One thing I would strongly recommend: ask for a deposit before starting the work, and make sure the client understands that the deposit is not refundable. If something goes wrong somewhere along the way and the client changes his mind, the deposit will be yours to keep for your efforts and materials used to that point. How much should the deposit be? I guess that depends on the total price; for me, the deposit I ask for is 50%

of the final price with the understanding that, if the client is not happy with the final product, he does not have to buy it. In that case, I would then be free to sell it to someone else if I can.

Finally, you should put your terms in writing. It does not have to be complicated. Simply write out what you have agreed on, the size, the price, cost of changes if any, amount of deposit and that is it non-refundable, deadline for completion, and anything else you have agreed to, and then both parties sign it and each keeps a copy. Then there's no room for argument later if you can't agree on something.<p>

Doing work on commission is very different than simply painting whatever you feel like. You are painting specifically for one client and according to an agreement which you have made. Such work is sometimes not as much fun as painting for yourself but it is a nice way to increase your income. If you're doing it for a regular client, it's a good way to cement your relationship with that client. Just make sure you understand the potential pitfalls before jumping in.

Suzette

"What makes art so wonderful is that each piece we create is like a signature. A reflection of our personality and our life." (Mary Susan Vaughn)

PS: On a personal note, my schedule has been very hectic lately with my move to my new studio, and so my blog posts are going to be less frequent for a while. The new studio and gallery are almost ready to open to the public. More on that in my next post.

Sept. 14, 2008

New Studio and Gallery

Today, I'd like to tell you all about my new studio and gallery. It's a brand-new gallery located in Maple Ridge and just opened to the public. It's the only one of its kind in Maple Ridge.

Here is the basic information:

New Creations Art Gallery and Studios

22409 McIntosh Avenue, Maple Ridge

Situated just across the town square, the entrance is on McIntosh, behind Jim's Pizza.

Open 7 days a week, from 10 to 5.

Grand opening weekend: October 18 and 19, 2008.

New Creations features: 5 resident artists, each with his own studio, a gallery, a gift shop and a workshop area. The resident artists are Jack Prasad, Suzette Fram, Shirley Thomas, Rosaline Kennedy and Lizette Tsuchiya.

We want to make a visit to New Creations a unique experience. You'll not only see art

works hanging in the gallery, but you'll meet the artists and have a chance to see their studios and watch them work. The result: a new way to experience art, with a personal connection to the art and to the artist.

There is a special room displaying Jack's 'Lumiere Noire' collection. These paintings have special paint incorporated in them that give very special effects when shown with a black light. The paintings look good either with traditional light, or with black light, with a slightly different look when shown with black light. It's a unique and innovative display well worth seeing.

The resident artists have their work displayed in the gallery until the end of the year. After that, we plan on having visiting artists each month, so that we'll have a brand new show each and every month. We want to make sure that there's always something new to see, making each visit a worthwhile experience.

So, we have great plans and much hope for a successful venture. I hope you'll come in and see us if you're in the area.

"The only things that stand between a person and what they want in life are the will to try it, and the faith to believe it's possible." (Rich Devos)

Suzette

PS: Next month, I'll talk about the issue of originality. What makes an art work original, when is a work not original, what is copying and what constitutes copyright infringement. Next post will be on October 1st.

October 1, 2008

Originality - Part 1

You hear the expression 'original art' all the time, but what does 'original' really mean?

Through the art club to which I belong, I've been involved in putting on many art shows, most of which were juried. The entry form for the show asks artists to certify that their work is original (from their own photos, sketches or imagination).

Sounds simple, doesn't it, and yet, we constantly come across grey areas that don't quite seem to fit the rule, or works where the subject matter makes it difficult to believe that the artist has painted it from personal experience. A good example of this is wildlife. When viewing a painting of a tiger, or an elephant, in its natural habitat, one has to wonder whether the painting was really done from personal experience, or copied from a book or other printed material.

So let's look at some basic requirements for originality.

- It must be painted (or drawn, or whatever) by hand, by the artist (and not reproduced in any way).
- The reference for the painting must be from the artist's own photograph, sketch, or painted from real life (or from imagination, in the case of an abstract). If reference material is used that is not one's own, it must represent only a small part of the painting, in other words, the composition must be substantially different than the reference material and be the artist's own.

To recap: the idea, the source or reference, and the execution, must all be the artist's own and not derived from anyone else.

We are surrounded by art all the time. Art is in every picture, book, publication we see; it's even on the packaging of most products we buy. We see and are inspired by other artists' work, all the time. We get ideas for our own work by looking at what others are doing. Where do we draw the line between being inspired by, and copying, others' work? For artists with integrity, the distinction is very important. To use an idea, or a technique, from another artist is done all the time; as long as our work looks different in the end, it is still original. And that is the key - to make sure that our work is substantially different in the end. It's a matter of integrity, self-esteem and reputation.

In my next blog, I'll discuss further some of the grey areas and other issues pertinent to originality. Next blog will be on October 15, 2008.

Suzette

"If the painting process is to be successful, we need to be able to apply paint expressively, to compose originally, and to maximize color as well as design."
(Stephen Quiller)

October 16, 2008

Originality - Part 2

To continue my discussion on originality (see previous post), here are some areas that are not so straight forward.

Photo transfers

If an image is mechanically reproduced and transferred to a surface and the artist then paints over and around it, is it still original? To me, it's a matter of degree. If the transferred image is only a small part of the painting, then I would not consider this a problem. If however, the transferred image represents most of the painting, then it's not really 'painted' by the artist, but rather 'coloured', or 'enhanced'. That painting is no longer an original.

Drawing aids

Some people use various aids to transfer their image onto the painting surface.

Some use grids, some use tracing paper, some project the image directly onto the canvas and copy it. Does that make the work any less of an original? I don't believe so. Since it's a painting, not a drawing, then the work must still be painted and the initial drawing, whether done completely freehand or with some help, is only the base upon which the painting will be built. I don't believe that affects the originality of the work as long as the source was original to the artist to begin with.

Hand-Embellished Reproductions

Some artists have their work reproduced on canvas and then they proceed to add a few (or many) brushstrokes to enhance and perhaps change the painting somewhat. Unless they completely repaint the image so that it is substantially different, then it is not an original work, it is still a reproduction. If the artist were to repaint it completely, then what would be the point of transferring the image in the first place? No, a reproduction is a reproduction; let's call a spade a spade.

Research / Reference Materials

At what point does using research or reference material interfere with the originality of the work? If you consult a number of photographs in order to understand the structure of a building, or animal, for example, that is research. It is not copying as long as you then use your knowledge to produce an image that is different than the reference material. You could, for example, use several sources of information and combine part of each one in order to come up with your own composition. That work would still be original. But if you copy the background exactly from one source, and the animal exactly from another, then you have just managed to 'steal' from two other artists (the photographers who took the pictures); there might also be an issue with the publisher of the material). The key with doing research is to use the material for ideas or information, not for copying.

In my next blog, I will continue the discussion on originality as it pertains to copyright issues. Next blog will be on November 1st, 2008.

Suzette

"Art is our language. Through it, we express the world as we see it and as we would like it to be. We come here from our own places -- different countries, backgrounds, races, experiences and personalities -- to tell our stories in a medium we all understand: line, form, colour, texture. This is the beauty of art -- that we are all different and we are all the same." (Catherine McLay – Painters Keys, Jun 17, 2008)

November 1, 2008

Originality - Part 3

Continuing my discussion on originality, this time I'm considering issues of copyright.

Copyright Infringement

When you create something, you own that thing, you own the copyright, ie the right to copy or reproduce that thing and profit from it. If someone copies one of your

paintings and sells it, they have stolen your image and profited by it. It's a clear case of copyright infringement.

When you paint and use someone else's photograph, you are doing the same thing. That photographer has probably gone to great lengths to get the right photograph, the right location, the right time, the right light. He owns that image as clearly as you own the image of your painting. If that photograph is published in a book or magazine, the publisher also has some rights with regard to that image. So using those images for more than general reference, is also a case of infringement.

Originality vs. Copyright

There seems to be a lot of confusion between the issue of originality and copyright infringement. The two are completely different issues and one must understand the difference. Copying from a copyright-free image*, is still copying, but it does not infringe on anyone's rights. It does however break the rule if entered into a show where originality is required. (In our club, we do allow the use of someone else's photograph if permission has been obtained from the author of the photograph, but I'm not sure why; the copying may have been done with permission, but it is still copying).

*(Copyright-free images are available from a number of sources, particularly the internet. They are only copyright-free if they are in the public domain (a topic for another time), or if the owner specifically says so where the images are found. Otherwise, images on the net, or in books, are covered by copyright laws.)

The following (taken from a post on www.artbizblog.com - Ethics and using other peoples photographs, Oct. 24/08) says it well:

"If the photograph is not in the public domain, and the painting does not add substantial additional artistic expression (basically the difference between "copying" and "inspiration") then the painting is a derivative work from the photo. If the painter does not own the photo, or does not have permission, then we're looking at a possible copyright infringement.... There's no % or other objective standard. It's case-by-case."

So, to conclude, the trick is to use material as reference, as study, for inspiration but never to copy from. Use it as a new idea, to try a different technique, but make it yours by making it unique. Don't forget to add 'substantial additional artistic expression'.

Suzette

"I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestioned ability of a man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor." (Henry David Thoreau)

November 15/08

Confidence

When you get right down to it, confidence is one of those things in life that can be elusive, difficult to find, but the difference in your life between having it, and not, is immense.

On a personal level, having confidence in yourself makes you appear capable, reliable, successful. When others see this capable person, they also have confidence in her and gladly engage and befriend her. Thus, confidence brings about friendship and social success.

As an artist, the confident person can paint with more assurance and bravura, imprinting her work with those bold brushstrokes that can really make a work come together and sign. Viewers notice the boldness, the genius, and respond accordingly. Again, confidence brings about success.

One would think that it's the other way around, that success would bring about confidence, and while there's some measure of truth in this statement, I am convinced that it usually works the other way around, that the very fact of being confident makes things happen more easily, or more successfully.

So, having said that, how does one get this so-important confidence? That, I'm afraid, is not so easily answered. It involves a number of factors. Like having done your homework so that you know your stuff and know that you can do it. Like not worrying so much what others think so that whether others like your work or not becomes unimportant, or less important at least. Like building small successes over small successes, until one feels successful.

One of the tricks I have found over the years is to 'act as if'. By that I mean that you act as if you already are what you wish to be. Want to be less shy and more outgoing? Enter a room and start talking to everyone 'pretending' that it's totally natural for you to behave this way and before you know it, it will be and it will feel comfortable. Want to be more successful? Act like a successful person, and you will attract the kind of success you seek.

Sound crazy? Don't make up your mind until you've tried it. It works.

"When you have confidence, you can have a lot of fun. And when you have fun, you can do amazing things." (Joe Namath)

Suzette

December 3/08

Trying Something Different

I have just returned from one of my painting trips. This time it was Salt Spring Island for a week of quiet, relaxation, painting and visiting galleries. These trips are a good

time to try new things, to let your creativity take over and guide you into uncharted territory.

I completed 3 paintings during this week. Two of them, one really as it's a diptych (two paintings that from one image), is a lovely semi-abstract landscape. Different than my usual style of painting. I'm quite pleased with it and I'm now planning on doing a series of these using different colour combinations. This first one is done in yellow and burnt orange, a really lovely and rich combination.

The third painting I did this week was something completely different. I wanted to do a paper weaving to collage onto a canvas. So that's what I did. I took a large sheet of watercolour paper and painted it in different shades ranging from yellow to red to burnt orange; I even included some gold. When that was done and dry, I cut the paper into strips ranging in width from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

I then proceeded to do the weaving. I used a large piece of gatorboard (it's like a styrofoam board that you can push pins into). Starting with the vertical strips, I pinned each strip at the top and bottom. Then I started with the horizontal strips, weaving them over and under the other strips. I tried to use the brightest ones in one area in order to create a bit of a focal point.

When that was all done, I then asked myself 'Now What?'. I had this square shape, but what was I going to do with it? After some thought, I decided to carefully cut a large circle out of the shape. I then painted a canvas with a complementary colour and collaged the circle and 2 of the corners onto the canvas, in what I think is an interesting arrangement. You can see a picture of the finished painting at the top of this post.

Sometimes it's good to try something different. It can energize and motivate you in unexpected ways.

Suzette

"Boldness has genius, power and magic. Engage, and the mind grows heated. Begin, and the work will be completed." (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

December 14/08

The 'Always' Grandma

Thinking about Christmas these days, and my grandchildren, I realized that I don't want their perception of me to change over the years, as we all get older. For them, it's always fun to go to Grandma's. Grandma is always glad to see you, she always makes a nice meal for you, she can do anything, she can buy anything, she always has time to listen and talk to you, she always has lots of stuff around to do projects, she always has ice cream in the freezer, and grapes on the counter, she always takes you shopping for your birthday, she always laughs at your jokes... You get the idea. I like that that's how they see me (or at least I think that's how they see me).

Once more this year, I'm looking forward to Christmas dinner with my children and grandchildren, and I'm looking forward to still being 'always' Grandma.

This will be my last entry this year so I'll take this opportunity to wish you all the very best this holiday season and a whole lot of good things during the coming year. In view of current economic problems, if next year is not the best financially, I hope it will be the best in other ways, such as love of family and friends, health and success in achieving that which makes your heart glad.

Merry Christmas.

Suzette

"To love and to be loved is to feel the sun from both sides." (David Viscott)
