

# Suzette's Art Blog

Ramblings & Musings on Art and Life

2009

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**January 1, 2009**

***Inspirational Thoughts***

On this January 1<sup>st</sup>, the start of another new year, I thought I'd look at some inspirational ideas. Rather than making resolutions, or setting goals, I'd like to get inspired **to live the best life I can, and to reach for that which will make my spirit soar**. So here is some food for thought, and inspiration.

- It's up to you to make it happen. You can! Just do it!
- Nothing is accomplished without effort and persistence.
- Start today, don't wait till tomorrow. Tomorrow may be too late.
- Success, happiness, it's really all up to us. It's inside of us, we have to look for it. We have to learn to reach for what we want, but we also have to learn to see and appreciate what is already in front of us.
- Attitude is everything.
- *"A man cannot directly choose his circumstances, but can choose his thoughts, and so indirectly, yet surely, shape his circumstances."* (James Allen)
- *"Courage does not always roar. Sometimes it is a quiet voice at the end of the day, saying... 'I will try again tomorrow'."* (Mary Anne Radmacher)
- *"I hold to the doctrine that with ordinary talent and extraordinary perseverance, all things are attainable."* (Thomas Buxton)
- *"Don't wait for inspiration. It comes while one is working."* (Henri Matisse)
- *"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."* (Annie Dillard)
- *"To accomplish great things, we must dream as well as act."* (Anatole France)  
*"To accomplish great things, we must act as well as dream".* (Suzette Fram)
- *"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)

Have a very good 2009.

Suzette

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**January 16, 2009**

***What's holding you back?***

Have you ever thought to yourself: I love to paint (or carve, or knit, or write), so why don't I do it more often? Sure, you can come up with all sorts of reasons why you

can't get to the studio, but don't you see, the question instead should be: Why don't I make it a priority to paint; why don't I make it happen?

For most of us, we could make more time, we just don't. Sometimes, it's a matter of setting priorities and making sure that some time is set aside on a regular basis. It may be necessary to have a schedule to make sure that time will be available. I am reminded of the old proverb: He who fails to plan, plans to fail.

Sometimes it's something else altogether. Sometimes, deep down, it's fear. Fear of not being up to the task; fear of having to face that blank canvas, of having to face ourselves and trying to find the necessary skills, inspiration, discipline and persistence to get the job done.

Even more scary, there's the fear of not finding those things in ourselves, and realizing that we are lacking somehow.

Remember my inspirational thoughts earlier this month? The first one was:

"It's up to you to make it happen. You can! Just do it!"

Here's another thought: "Being courageous is being afraid and doing it anyway."

So, if that applies to you, go ahead, be afraid, but don't let it stop you. Do it anyway. Plan to do it, and do it.

Suzette

*"You have to write badly in order to write well. Get it down. Take chances. It may be bad, but it's the only way you can do anything really good."* (William Faulkner)

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**February 2, 2009**

**Mediocrity**

Do you ever worry that your work is not bad, but not great? That it is (heaven forbid) mediocre. That horrible word, mediocre. Wouldn't you rather be terrible than mediocre?

Here is one of my favourite quotes, from Ayn Rand:

*"Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark, in the hopeless swamps of the approximate, the not-quite, the not-yet, the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration for the life you deserved, but have never been able to reach. Check your road and the nature of your battle. The world you desire can be won. It exists, it is real, it is possible, it is yours".*

The first sentence, "...the hopeless swamps of the approximate, the not-quite, the not-yet, the not-at-all..." is so well put. I know for me it is a real fear, the fear of being caught in the 'hopeless swamp of the not-quite'.

Diane Overmyer, of Wakarusa, IN, USA, says: "*You need to be the best or you need to be different*". That might be one answer to the problem of mediocrity. If you can't make that scene every bit as good or better than anyone else, why not try to do something different; change the scene, change the mood, make it more painterly, or more abstract; be more bold in your approach to colour or style; do something to distinguish it from all the others.

All my life, that's been my philosophy; if I can't be better, then I want to distinguish myself some other way. I don't want to be one of the crowd. I want to stand out.

I recently read a book on success (The Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell). What an interesting book; I would recommend it to anyone. The bottom line of this book for me was that at this stage of my life, the best thing I can do to improve my chances of success, is practice, practice, practice, work, work, work. So many factors are outside of our control in achieving success, but that one is not. That one is entirely up to me.

So, bottom line, the more I work, the better I will become, and that is the only way to get myself out of the 'swamp of the not-quite'.

Suzette

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**February 15, 2009**

**Talent**

Talent

Is there such a thing as talent? I don't mean extraordinary, genius kind of talent. I mean ordinary talent, the kind that many artists have that helps them produce very nice, very accomplished work. Is it talent, or is it hard work and tenacity?

Oh sure, there are those very few 'geniuses' that seem to rise above the rest, for whom it seems natural, almost easy, to produce masterpieces. I'm not talking about them right now.

For most artists, talent, ie being able to produce good accomplished paintings (or sculptures, or whatever), comes at a high price. That price includes a lot of time spent learning; it includes practicing, over and over; it means making painting a priority; it means making time for it even in the face of a very busy life; it means persevering and staying with it, even when things aren't going too well; it means overcoming discouragement; it means struggling; it means being afraid of failing and doing it anyway.

The word talent implies that it is a gift, that it is easy; it seems to indicate that it is something one is born with and we just have to use it. I don't agree with that. The dictionary defines talent as 'a special natural ability or aptitude' or 'a marked innate ability'. As far as I'm concerned, talent is the result of hard work and I would rather be called 'accomplished' than 'talented', because that at least indicates that there was effort involved rather than it being a gift given to me.

The price of talent is courage, determination, perseverance, and most of all, hard work. To achieve talent, you need the will and the tenacity to keep working at it until you get good.

Film maker Sam Goldwyn said *"The harder I work, the luckier I get."* My version of that would be: *"The harder I work, the more talented I get"*.

Having said all this, it wouldn't be right for me to leave it at that. I have to say that talent may come at a price, but the rewards are great. The feeling of accomplishment when finishing a piece that I like is wonderful, and the sense of pride when someone tells me they like my work is very real.

So, yes, it's hard work, but it's worth it.

Suzette

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**March 3, 2009**

***Calling Yourself An Artist***

Do you call yourself an artist? Are you able to proudly proclaim 'I am an artist', without feeling uncomfortable about it?

I have talked to several artists who seem reluctant to apply the 'artist' label to themselves. They think they don't qualify for the title, or they're not worthy of it, or they're not talented enough, or experienced enough, etc. etc.

Recently on Painters' Keys (Irwin Greenberg, February 17, 2009), there was a list of 100 pieces of advice from artist Irwin Greenberg. Advice #67 was "Don't call yourself an artist. Let others name you that. "Artist" is a title of great weight." (For the full list, go to <http://clicks.robertgenn.com/irwin-greenberg.php>)

So that made me ask myself, what does it take to be artist? What makes an artist? Who decides who is an artist, and who is not?

This is how I see it: If you write, you are a writer; if you bake, you are a baker; if you make art, you are an artist. What could be simpler. The difference lies in

what kind of artist you are. You could be a professional artist, a part-time artist, an aspiring artist, a struggling artist or a student artist, but if you make art, you ARE an artist. Frankly, in my book, if you love art, you are an artist at heart.

There is no 'special' meaning to the word 'artist'. It's not like being a president or prime minister where you have to be 'elected'. It's not like being a doctor or lawyer, where you have to complete the necessary schooling, and the practical training, and then be certified by the governing body for that profession.

Being an artist is something you feel, something you live, something you are. So go ahead, call yourself an artist. Why not?

Suzette

*"I am an artist... I am here to live out loud"*. (Emile Zola)

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**March 15, 2009**

***The Purpose of Art***

What is the purpose of art?

What purpose does art serve in our lives, on a personal level, as part of a community? What purpose does art serve in society, for the present time, or historically?

There is art that is beautiful and functional. There is art that is beautiful and serves no other purpose than to move us. There is art that shocks us. There is art that is decorative and beautifies our surroundings. There is art that makes a statement and is meant to increase awareness of a problem, encouraging us to find solutions. There is art that documents life during a certain time, as a record for future generations.

Obviously, there are many purposes to art, but there are also many purposes to the making of art. Why do we make art? Some do it for the pleasure and satisfaction found in the making of it, or the feeling of accomplishment felt afterwards. Some do it for the practical reason of manufacturing something for sale, to make a living. Some do it as a means of sending a message, making a statement. It may be personal self-expression, or it may be a means to address social problems.

Is one type of art better than the other? Must art have a 'greater purpose' like changing society's views on certain subjects? Is art that enriches and embellishes our lives and homes less worthy than art that makes a statement?

For those who buy art, what is their motivation? Do they do it because they love the work in question and can't live without it? Do they do it to keep up with the neighbours? Do they do it to show how successful or affluent they are? Or do they do it simply because they want to embellish their surroundings? And does it really matter why they do it?

I have a lot of questions today, but no answers. And perhaps the answers are different for everyone. Different answers for different viewpoints. And that's quite alright, I think. We don't all have to agree, that's what makes life interesting.

Suzette

*"Making art, like having children, is one way of making life worth living. And artworks, like children, are essays of our lives and a measure of the things we hold important."* (Ted Orland)

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**April 3, 1009**

**Art Instruction**

I used to love to take workshops. From a few hours to a whole week, spending time with a professional artist, observing and then trying out new techniques, that can be so much fun. I particularly like to observe the instructor doing a demonstration. I find that I learn a lot from that.

There are different ways to take instruction in painting. From continuing classes with the same instructor, kind of like a mentoring situation, to short-term classes with different instructors, to workshops, all involve an instructor passing along HIS ideas and HIS methods and techniques.

For a while, that's a great way to learn. Learning from one instructor will tend to lead you into solid and consistent work but will not expose you to different ways of doing things. Learning from several instructors will expose you to a lot of different methods and opinions, allowing you to decide for yourself which best serve your needs.

The problem with taking a lot of workshops from a lot of different instructors, is that you start to get scattered and lose focus. You get all these great ideas but a lot of them don't work together, so how do you incorporate them into your work? How do you even remember what 'your' work is? I experienced this personally. At a time when my work was changing, I became very confused as to which direction I wanted my work to go into and taking workshops became a detriment rather than a help.

What I'm trying to say is that there comes a time when you must fly solo. Sooner or later, you must develop your own style, find your own voice, make your own choices. You must learn to be you, instead of learning to paint like your instructor.

Only then can you begin to find yourself. And trust me, the journey to find yourself will be an exciting one, full of possibilities and new adventures. It will be done without the security of having an instructor telling you where you're going wrong or what you're doing right, but the rewards, the feeling of accomplishment will be greater. And you will continue to learn, only this time, you will learn from yourself, from your own tribulations and experimentations. It will be a great journey.

Does that mean I don't recommend classes or workshops? Not at all! But like with all things in life, I recommend moderation and balance, and an open mind.

Suzette

*"My work is always better when I'm alone and follow my own impressions."* (Claude Monet)

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**April 19, 2009**

***The Need to Create***

I often ask myself 'Why do I paint?' Why do I paint, and someone else carves, or makes jewelry, or whatever? I think we ALL need to create and we find different ways to do it. For me, it's painting, but it can be writing, fine cooking, baking special desserts; it can be spending special time with your children reading or doing art; it can be sewing, gardening, it can even be keeping a neat and organized home, or tinkering in the garage and inventing things.

What I'm getting at is my firm belief that being creative is a BASIC HUMAN NEED. So, what is it that being creative does for us?

- We need to feel good about ourselves and about our lives. Accomplishing something that we are proud of makes us feel better.
- There's the pleasure we experience while doing whatever it is we choose to do.
- There's the feeling of accomplishment when we're done.
- There's pride in the accomplishment.
- There's having a purpose, something to do, and something to look forward to.
- There's feeling that life has meaning, that we are making a contribution, leaving our mark.
- And if nothing else, it's something to do to pass the time, or to relax.

Some think that painting should be a deep, meaningful experience, and that art, paintings especially, should convey a message, benefit society in some way. That's a very lofty goal but I really don't think most of us experience that at all. I believe most of us just want to make something nice, something that speaks to us, something that enriches our lives through the experience of making it and through living with it afterward and sharing it with others, now and after we've gone.

And the sharing with others is an important part of the experience. We need that experience to complete the process of creating. The following quote really expresses that thought well.

*"Our paintings are not whole until they are seen by the viewers; our poems are not complete until a reader speaks them aloud; our goals do not become a reality until we call them into being by our voices. (Lynda Lambert, Pennsylvania artist, Professor of Fine Art and Humanities; Poet; Author)*

Suzette

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**May 1, 2009**

### **Critiques**

One of the most difficult things to do for an artist is walking the difficult path of trying to be true to yourself and your vision versus listening to what others say and think in order to improve your work.

This leads me to talk about the value of critiques and juries. I've talked about juried shows in a previous blog (March 10/08) so today I'm talking about critiques. How valuable is it to have your work critiqued by your peers, or by a superior artist or teacher?

To be effective, a critique should at the very least point out some good points before launching into what's wrong with the work, and even then, I believe a critique should take into consideration who the artist is, ie how experienced the artist is and where he or she is in their journey. A good critique should address only a few important points with suggestions on how to make them better, not go into a diatribe of everything that's wrong with the work. That only serves to destroy the artist's feelings and confidence and achieves nothing. Because in the end, I believe that everyone sees things differently, and the list of what's wrong can be very different from one person to the next, confirming my opinion that IT'S ALL SUBJECTIVE anyway and only one person's opinion. And that is how we need to take it. If we can learn something from it, fine, otherwise, it's meaningless, and useless.

The only value of critiques for me is to see how others perceive my work. Their ideas on what could be done differently usually reflect their personal bias based on their own work, and seldom match my vision for the work. And there's always the danger of a serious critique session resulting in shaking your confidence in your own work, sending you back to making some changes which you may well regret later (spoken from experience).

So yes, I like to hear how others (artists AND the public) respond to my work. There are sometimes some surprises there for me and that may lead me to re-evaluate

things from time to time, but I try not to put too much importance on the opinions of others. It is after all what I think that matters.

Suzette

*"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)

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**May 16, 2009**

### ***An Interesting Experiment***

With the economy being the way it is, I recently had an idea of something I could do that would benefit both myself and my viewers. I decided to do a raffle. This is how it works:

Tickets are \$10 (or 3 for \$20)

The prize is a \$500 gift certificate for any of my paintings, up to a value of \$500.

I will sell only enough tickets to raise \$500, which will pay for the prize.

I have given myself 3 months to sell the necessary tickets. The prize will be drawn when I have raised the \$500, or on July 31<sup>st</sup>, whichever comes first.

I will post the name of the winner on my website once the draw has taken place.

I introduced this during my recent open studio weekend with some degree of success. Many visitors thought it a great idea and happily bought a ticket. Some did not.

It is an interesting experiment. There is a small element of risk in there for me in that if I am unable to sell all the tickets by the deadline, I may suffer a bit of a loss. But that was a risk I was willing to take.

Of course, this raffle idea would only be of interest to people who really like my work, otherwise what would be the point of winning art work that you're not really fond of.

So time will tell how well this will work. The funny thing is, I've already discovered one drawback: I actually have to sell these tickets, by that I mean I have to mention them to people and ask them if they'd like one. Strangely enough, that's the part of the whole plan I had not thought of.

Could this be an idea that will spread among other artists?

Suzette

PS: If you would like to purchase a ticket, please email me. Payment can be made by Paypal, or cheque in the mail. I will be happy to enter your name in the draw.

*"Succeeding takes more than technical skill, inspiration or simple forbearance. It incorporates your state of mind, your powers of thought and expression, your self-discipline and your strength of character." (Irwin Greenberg)*

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**June 4, 2009**

### ***Is the Art Market Dead?***

I am a baby boomer. There are many many of us around the same age and therefore around the same time of life, ie retired, or soon to be. With so many of us of the same generation, having lived a similar kind of life, and having arrived at this time of life when our children are grown and have left home, and contemplating retirement, many are now looking for something meaningful to do. From what I can see, many of us have taken up painting with all the passion and gusto that we used to reserve for family and job.

What does this mean? In my observation, it means that there are more and more painters all the time; most of them take it quite seriously; and everyone wants to show their art and hopes to sell it.

And it follows that there are more painters, and more paintings, and more art shows and art festivals, than ever before, but not necessarily more public. There seems to be a decline in interest in art shows and art festivals. There seems to be a decline in sales.

The people who come to art shows, it seems, are mostly artists themselves. They can appreciate the art but are not likely to buy anything generally. Besides, so many have arrived at a time in their life when they're downsizing and have no room for more art. I hear this all the time: 'I love it, but where would I put it?'

While the purpose of making art is not simply for sales, let's face it, we paint because we love it, an occasional sale is still a necessary part of the process. It not only boosts our egos a little bit, showing us that our work has value and we're not doing it for nothing, it also helps pay for the surprisingly expensive process of producing and marketing our work.

Furthermore, putting on art shows, or participating in festivals, is an incredible amount of work; it is demanding and very tiring, mentally and physically. Physically, there's the packing, transporting and setting up, not to mention taking down. But there's also meeting the public and talking about your art and your methods, all day long. Believe it or not, it's hard work and it's difficult to maintain your energy and enthusiasm throughout the day. To do it all for no sales is very disheartening.

So, is the art market dead for most of us who are not famous painters whose works sell themselves? Gosh, I hope not, but I do believe that it is more difficult then ever, and that there's no real answer to this, other than: paint for the love of it and try to get better all the time. Try to do it to feed your soul, if not your pocketbook.

Suzette

*"Meeting the public is hard work and it takes tough people who are determined to survive and thrive... Art shows are high stress times for all of us, partly because many things need to come together in a very short period of time and partly because showing one's craft taps deep into the hopes and fears we carry just beneath the hard shell we have all evolved to deal with the business side of art." (author unknown, quote provided by Jerry Conrad, WA, USA)*

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**June 17, 2009**

***Is The Art Market Dead, Part 2***

In my last blog entry, I talked about the fact that there are more painters today than ever before; there are also more art shows and art festivals than ever before; and it seems that we may have reached a saturation point in terms of interest on the part of the public. Which lead me to ask the question 'Is The Art Market Dead?'

Today, I'd like to expand on that a little bit, in terms of other factors which make it more difficult then ever to sell paintings. And that is the overabundance of cheap art everywhere you look. You can now buy very nice (and inexpensive) reproductions on canvas just about anywhere; I've seen them at London Drugs, Home Sense, Rona; everyone is jumping on the bandwagon it seems. And then there's Ebay where hand-painted canvases start at \$1. I can tell you right now, you can't paint a painting for \$1 in cost of materials, so how can anyone sell paintings at that price?

Of course, you have to know what you're buying. The nice prints at Home Sense are printed by the thousands and shipped everywhere. For all you know, everybody else on your street could have the same print in their living room. As to the \$1 paintings, most of them come from China and are copied from other artists and painted assembly-line style, so while they may be 'hand-painted', they are certainly not original works, nor are they one- of-a-kind works.

Have you heard how these assembly-line paintings are made? This is more or less how they're done. They're painted in a large room with several artists. One artist has a brush with blue paint and he paints a patch of sky on painting after painting. The next artist has green paint and he dabs on some trees, painting after painting. The next one adds mountains, flowers, etc. etc. You get the idea. They may produce 100 paintings that day and they are all very much alike.

I think the bottom line is this: there is something special about owning a hand-made, original, unique piece of work made by the hand of the artist, a piece that includes the artist's blood, sweat and tears, and a little bit of their soul. Not a copy of it, but the real thing. That has to be special. That has to give the work more value. And in the end, that's what we're selling, that uniqueness, that personal touch.

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)*

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**July 2, 2009**

### ***Talking About Your Art***

Are you able to talk comfortably about your work with the viewing public? Are you able to explain your techniques, your goals, the meaning of your work?

Every time you're in a show and meeting the public, it's important that you be able to make a connection with visitors by having a conversation with them, and that usually means talking about your work. Visitors are interested in making a connection with the artist, on a personal level.

Talking about your work is a little bit like preparing an artist statement. It requires a little thought, preparation, and a little practice. You can't expect to be able to pull the words right out of thin air.

A good way to do this is to do some brainstorming. Take a piece of paper and write down everything you can think of to describe your work, how it's achieved, and what it means to you. Write everything down that crosses your mind. Don't edit yet. When you've put down all you could think of, then start looking at what you've got to pull out the best of the ideas. Combine them in a logical way and then edit and cut out until you have something succinct but very descriptive of your individual work. Try to find one or two points in particular that you can focus on and that give meaning to the work.

For example, I often say about my work that it's all about colour for me, it's about how colours and shapes interact together and how they make you feel. Which is why I don't try to be realistic because that's not what I'm after. I'm after a colour statement, either completely abstract, or in a semi-abstract rendition of a landscape or still life.

By the time you're done, you'll not only have really good material for your artist statement, but you'll also be very well prepared to talk about your work because by then, you'll know the important points by heart. You'll also have a better

understanding of your own work and processes and what it all means to you and to the public.

Suzette

*"Colour is a power which directly influences the soul."* (Wassily Kandinsky)

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**July 17, 2009**

### ***Keeping Records***

Are you one of those people who keeps track of everything, every painting, where it's been shown, who it was sold to and for how much? Or are you one of those who keeps no records at all and relies on her memory?

Well, I'm a record keeper. For those who know me personally, that will come as no surprise. I like order and organization, and keeping records fits right in with that philosophy.

There are real benefits to keeping records, and you know what? It doesn't have to be complicated. Being quite comfortable with computers, I've tried several different systems before settling down to the one I use now. And I want to share it with you because it's so easy.

I tried using special computer software for artists. Very cumbersome. I tried using a computer spreadsheet, and then a simple list in a word processing program. Did it work? Sure, but it was always a pain because it was in the computer and I had to keep printing lists to have the information at hand all the time.

So I went manual and simple. This is my system. I use index cards and a little box to keep them in. Just like you would for recipes. Every time I finish a painting, I take a new card and write the title and the year completed on it. Then I add the size, medium and price. On the rest of the card, I make a notation every time the painting is shown somewhere. I also make notations such as awards won, or anything else of interest. When a painting is sold, I write the date and the name of the buyer if I have it, and I put the card in a special section at the back for sold paintings.

That's it. It's so easy. And it's so convenient. At any time, I can pull out the card for any painting and get a complete history for that painting. When trying to decide what to enter in a show, I can go through the cards and see what hasn't been shown in that show before and quickly figure out what to enter. The cards are in alphabetical order, making it easy and quick to locate any one painting.

My system could be made better if I were to include a photo of the painting with the card and I suppose one of these days I may do just that. Wish I had thought of it when I first started out.

I encourage you to keep records of your paintings. Not only for your use now, but looking at it long-term, you may one day be very glad you have all that information at your fingertips. You never know.

Suzette

"Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment." (Jim Rohn)

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**August 1, 2009**

***And The Winner Is....***

Yesterday was July 31, the day to make the draw for a \$500 gift certificate good for any of my work. A while back, I told you about my raffle experiment. I thought, in these days of poor economic times, what better way to effectively sell some work than by offering \$10 raffle tickets to visitors to my studio and shows, the prize being a \$500 gift certificate. The maximum number of tickets would be 50, and if I sold them all, I would raise exactly \$500 and some lucky person would go home with artwork of their choice.

So yesterday, I asked fellow artist and studio mate Jack Prasad to do the draw for me. I had a lot of friends and collectors who bought tickets and I did not want to be involved with picking the winning ticket. So Jack picked the winning ticket and signed the back of it as my witness.

I am pleased to announce that the winner is Darcy Colwell of Maple Ridge. Darcy is a friend and collector of my work and I am very happy for her. I called her yesterday and she is thrilled and in fact already has her eye on one or two paintings that she would like to take home.

So, was the experiment a success and would I do it again?

Most of the people I mentioned it to thought it was a good idea and were happy to buy a ticket. However, I realized rather quickly that I had to 'sell' the tickets, in other words, I had to mention it to people, explain how it works and ask them if they would like to buy a ticket. That, as I quickly found out, I did not like to do. I am not a sales person and I did not like having to do that. I had a sign up on my table and after a while, I didn't mention it anymore, leaving it to people to read the sign and ask about it if they were interested.

In the end, I did not sell all 50 tickets, but I am not unhappy with the results. And no, I would not do it again for that very reason, that I did not like having to sell them, I wanted them to sell themselves.

It's interesting to know that I have similar feelings about selling my own work. When I do outdoor shows, or when visitors come to my studio, sometimes I talk to people in depth, talking about the work and my techniques, sometimes I just exchange pleasantries, sometimes I just say hello and only speak to them if they linger and are obviously interested. I have grown tired of in-depth conversations about my work unless the viewer is obviously interested. I do not want to have to do a 'sell' job to people who are not interested in buying, for both our sakes.

Could that be why my sales are not as good as I'd like them to be? Would sales be better if I did more of a sales job? Interesting thought and one I'll leave for another day.

Suzette

*"Don't aim at success – the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue... as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a course greater than oneself."* (Viktor Frankl)

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**August 19, 2009**

**Doubt**

I read a blog recently where the question was asked 'do you doubt your work?'. That got me thinking about the subject and ask myself whether it is a good thing, or a bad thing, to have doubts and what effect does that have on your work and on your progression and growth as an artist.

Here's some food for thought:

- do you doubt your work
- do you look at it and see all this is wrong, or do you see nothing wrong at all
- do you put everything you can into each work, ie finish it to the degree you want it, or do you leave it feeling unsatisfied, feeling perhaps that it should be better but you are not capable of making it better
- do you doubt yourself
- do you doubt your skills
- do you doubt that you are a 'real' artist
- do you seek perfection, never being quite pleased or satisfied
- are you your own worst critic, focusing on every little imperfection instead of leaving well enough alone
- if you feel no doubt, are you too confident, have you stopped growing
- where is the line between expecting too much of yourself or expecting too little
- where is the line between perfection and overdone
- where is the line between a work that is fresh and not overdone, and a work that was finished too soon and really needed more work.

As artists, we can be our own worst critics. On the one hand, we can sometimes focus on every little imperfection instead of seeing the picture as a whole. That can be counterproductive. On the other hand, we need to be critical of our work, we need to try and see where and how the work could have been better, at least as a lesson learned for the next painting. But we also need to give ourselves a pat on the back for those things that turned out well. We need to keep in mind what stage we are at, ie beginner, intermediate or advanced, or struggling to learn vs experienced and accomplished.

I believe it's a good thing to have some doubt, to question ourselves, to question whether we have done our best, or whether we need to try harder next time. But too much doubt just means a lack of self confidence and that is not good as it will be reflected in the quality of our work, through a lack of spontaneity and assurance and personality.

If you'd like to read the blog I referred to above, here's a link to it. There are some interesting comments. <http://www.artbizblog.com/2009/07/doubt.html>

Suzette

*"I am doubtful of any talent, so whatever I choose to be, will be accomplished only by long study and work."* (Jackson Pollock)

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**September 2, 1009**

***Putting Yourself Out There***

I know that we all paint for different reasons. For some, it's something to do to pass the time, to de-stress, to escape the demands of everyday life. Some paint strictly for themselves. For others, it's more of a serious pursuit, to show and sell, and maybe make a career out of it.

Whatever your reasons are, I believe it's important to show your work. I think that the creative process is a cycle and that showing your work to the public completes the cycle. I believe we need to show it, we need to get some feedback from the public, as much as we need to create in the first place. Making an occasional sale is icing on the cake in terms of satisfying our need for validation, not to mention helping to pay for more art supplies.

So how do we get exposure, how do we get our work 'out there' for people to see? Here are some ideas:

- Of course, the first thing to do is to put your artwork all over your house, so all visitors will get a chance to see it.

- If you join an art organization, they will have shows on a regular basis; you'll get a chance to exhibit.
- You can approach local places like restaurants, hospitals, doctor's offices and ask them if you could display a few paintings. Any place that is public will bring exposure to your work. Of course, be sure to include your business card with telephone number and price, that way if anyone is interested in purchasing the work, they can contact you.
- There are also art festivals taking place in every town all the time. You could show your work at those. I'll devote my next blog to what's needed and how to set up at one of those festivals.
- You can approach commercial galleries and seek representation, or ask for your own show, solo or as part of a small group.
- You can go to a park on a nice summer day and set up your easel and start painting. Bring some finished paintings with you and set them out for people to see. People love to watch artists at work so you'll get lots of attention. (Although be sure to make sure first that it's OK for you to do this, I know that in Stanley Park, you need to pay in order to be allowed to set up.)
- Have a website, either your own, or as part of a group site or online gallery. If someone sees your work and decides to check you out, they'll google your name and you want to make sure that they can find you and see your work that way.
- Think outside the box. For example, you can get a friend with a nice big house to throw an 'art party' for you. You display your work all over her house and she invites all her friends. It would be customary for you to reward your friend for doing this by either giving her a percentage of sales, or by giving her a painting.
- Participate in local events and volunteer to help. Get your name out there and get people to know who you are.

As you can see, there are many ways to show your work. So get out there and let the world see what you've been up to.

Suzette

*"Love what you do. Believe in your instincts. And you'd better be able to pick yourself up and brush yourself off every day. While life is not always fair, it is manageable. It's a matter of attitude and confidence."* (Mario Andretti)

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**September 15, 2009      Doing Art Festivals**

In my last blog, I talked about getting your work out there for others to see. One of those ways is to participate in art festivals in neighbouring communities.

Today, I thought I'd talk about what's involved in doing an art festival, what you need to know and the equipment you will need.

Most art festivals take place outside. The atmosphere outside is more festival-like, BUT you are at the mercy of the weather. There are usually a lot of artists participating and there's a wonderful camaraderie going on with other artists and with the public.

So what do you need to do a festival?

First, you need to find out everything you can about the event to make sure that it suits you, your work and your schedule. Then you need to apply usually providing pictures of your work. It is quite standard for organizers to want to see samples of your work before accepting you. Also, there's usually a fee to pay in order to participate and most shows charge a small commission on sales.

Once you've been accepted comes the tough part, planning. Make yourself a checklist and use it. Go over it several times to make sure you've got everything listed. A very useful thing to do is to go to shows and look at what people are doing for protection and displays, how they organize their booth; see what works and what doesn't from the standpoint of a customer. That will help you decide what you need to do.

Here are some of the things on my checklist:

The first things is, do you need a canopy, or umbrella for protection from the sun and/or rain? Most festivals allow, or even require, you to have a 10x10 standard canopy. The best kind to get is the pop-up kind, although it still takes 2 people to put it up. These don't have to be expensive, shop around, particularly in the spring. You can get a good sturdy one at Costco for about \$200. You can get less expensive ones than that, though they're not as sturdy, but still quite acceptable. Some of these also come with walls that can be attached in case of rain. You might think about getting a couple of walls in case you have to block the rain from coming in.

Next you need display equipment. Of course, that will be different with different kinds of art. For painters, you need some way to hang your work. There are many options here. You can have panels located around the outside or in the middle of the booth: wood with pegboard insert is an example, another one is gridwall panels. Using panels is a fairly expensive proposition, not to mention the difficulty in transporting and setting them up.

Another option is to use easels. There are many types. Some are wooden and are generally more sturdy and more expensive. A good option for outdoor shows are the

'wreath stands' that you can order at flower shops. They're not very expensive, you can get them as tall as 5 feet, and you can dig the 'feet' into the ground which makes them fairly sturdy. They're also easy to fold up and transport.

Then you'll probably want a table for your smaller items and business cards, and a chair. A card rack if you sell art cards, although you can also just put them in a pretty box on your table; stand them on their sides so people can scan through them easily. Put a nice tablecloth on your table; it's not necessary to have one of those fancy ones with the ruffles that go to the floor, just get a nice large tablecloth that goes down quite a bit on the front and sides, the longer the better; that also allows you to hide some of your things under the table without everyone seeing the mess.

A good strategy when doing festivals is to have things at different price points. Small and large paintings, art cards, perhaps some unframed pieces wrapped in cellophane, and if you have them, a few prints. That gives customers more options than just having large expensive paintings.

A few things you don't want to forget: something warm to wear in case it gets cold; water and food; lots of business cards; a sign with your name on it; your biography; a float so you can make change; price cards naturally; you should have an invoice or receipt book to record sales and some pens; plastic bags to put sold things into; something to do in case it's quiet, like something to work on, or something to read; sunscreen; bug repellent (try a sheet of Bounce, attach it to your chair or anywhere near you, works like a charm); and finally, things like tape, string, a few tools, scissors, kleenex or paper towel.

Finally, the thing to remember about festivals is that the weather is unpredictable, but if you're willing to go along with that, they can be a lot of fun. You'll meet a lot of people, get feedback on your work, make contacts, and hopefully, have a good time doing it.

Suzette

*"Without ambition one starts nothing. Without work one finishes nothing. The prize will not be sent to you. You have to win it." (Ralph Waldo Emerson)*

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**October 5, 2009**

***When Is It Time To Stop?***

Have you ever looked at a work in progress and thought 'this painting is not working and I really don't like it'? It happens to me all the time. There seems to be stage in the painting process, about three quarters of the way, when a painting reaches that ugly stage. Fortunately, I know that if I keep going, it usually comes together and I'm

pleased with the results in the end. That's when I know the painting is finished.

My food for thought today is this: 'When is it time to stop?' When do you keep going and push through the ugly stage to find the beautiful painting you're after, OR when do you admit that it's a lost cause and it's time to give up? Because, whether we like it or not, there are times when nothing we can do will salvage a painting that's not working out, and we can save ourselves a lot of heartache by giving up and starting over.

HOWEVER, having said that, I believe that there is a great learning opportunity here for those brave enough to try it. What this calls for is 'bravura', doing bolder and bolder things, things you've never tried before, until one of 2 things happen: I either create a very original piece of work, or it becomes garbage and gets thrown away or painted over. Either way it's a useful exercise as you let your imagination run wild, you let your creativity take over, without judgement, as carefree as a child, and, trust me, wonderful things can happen in that state of mind. If nothing else, it's a great creativity exercise. I highly recommend it.

The other side of the coin of course is this: When is it time to stop, when you have a wonderfully fresh and spontaneous piece that works just the way it is? Why continue and lose that freshness and spontaneity that you can never recover? That's always a tough call for an artist and we must be on the lookout for those moments and not lose them just because we can't see the forest for the trees.

So that's the balancing act for us artists, not stopping too soon versus not going on too long. Not an easy thing.

*"A painting is always finished before the artist thinks it is."* (Harley Brown)

Suzette

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**October 20, 2009**

***My Gallery Experience***

I moved into my new studio a year ago last month. This studio is one of 5 and part of a gallery which is open to the public 6 days per week. The past year has been an interesting experience and I've learned some things along the way, and I've had some of my ideas and preconceptions of what it would be like, somewhat altered.

It's really a 2-sided coin. On the one hand, working with other artists, in an atmosphere of camaraderie and common interests and goals, has been marvelous. I really enjoy the company and the exchange of views and ideas. It can be a very stimulating environment.

On the other hand, being in a gallery atmosphere and meeting lots of people has been a double-edged sword. It's great to meet people and have a chance to show and discuss your work with them. It's exposure, and we all need lots of exposure, that's for sure.

BUT, and unfortunately there is a big but, having lots of people come into the gallery also means that you are continuously interrupted; it makes it difficult to concentrate and you sometimes have to stop in the middle of a wash or a step that really needs to be done in one operation. So that can cause problems.

The other thing is that you find yourself having to become a salesperson. And I have found out that being an artist and being a salesperson are two very different things. I am not a salesperson and do not enjoy being one. I do shows and festivals and enjoy talking to people during those events, which usually last only a couple of days. To do it on a permanent basis, day after day, has not been my cup of tea.

I have gained a whole new perspective on gallery owners and dealers and what is required to run a successful business and to put together shows that are interesting and varied. The bottom line for me is that I like being an artist and I would prefer to leave the selling part to those who are better most suited to it. To run a successful gallery, you have to cultivate a client base of art lovers and collectors who continue to come into your gallery and who actually buy art. Having a lovely gallery and lots of visitors is not enough; if no one buys the work then you are spending your time, energy and money on a pointless venture. That, after a while, affects your drive, your purpose and your motivation.

So, after a year, I have decided to move my studio back home where I can work at my own pace and in my own time, with as few or as many interruptions as I choose to have. And while I will remain associated with the gallery, I will no longer have my studio there. It was an interesting learning experience.

Suzette

*"There is no companion that is as companionable as solitude."* (Henry David Thoreau)

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**November 15, 2009**      ***Painting exactly what you see***

Whether you paint from photographs or from life, painting exactly what you see may not be the best way to go.

I recently had a discussion with a couple of artists, one of them a relatively new artist, who was talking about some classes she is taking. She was saying that her

instructor insists that she match the colours in her painting exactly to those in the photograph she is using as reference. That led us to an interesting conversation about using photographs and about intuition and artistic licence.

I thought it was a terrible idea to match the photo exactly, whether the composition or the colours. A reference photo is just that, a reference. Once the main elements are in place, I believe one should put the photograph away and follow one's intuition, and take liberties with composition and colour in order to make a better painting. The same applies to painting on site. I've always heard 'paint exactly what you see', or 'look very closely at the colours that you see so you can reproduce them'. I so completely disagree with that.

The example I used was this: if you go out and paint a street scene, the street is gray; just plain dull gray. Well, you can't paint that street just plain dull gray, it'll kill your painting. You're probably going to want to use some purples or blues in the shadows, and then a warmer shade of gray in the light. You can make that street really interesting looking by adding your own version of colour into the gray, by making it really painterly. Your painting is going to come to life and vibrate with interesting colour. Following exactly what you see would be the worst thing you could do, in my opinion.

Another thing I often notice is that some artists will slavishly follow the photograph, and sometimes there will be an element in the photo that is confusing, either because it's hard to tell exactly what it is, or maybe only a portion is showing and that adds confusion. Some artists will paint that portion exactly as they see it, so that it continues to be confusing. When I look at such a painting, my first thought is 'what is that thing, why is it in there?'. And I would bet that most viewers would think exactly the same thing. Trust me, you want people to admire the painting when they see it, not wonder what that 'thing' is. That 'thing' becomes the focal point because it's so noticeable and confusing.

So if you use photographs as reference for your paintings, please, once you've got the elements mapped out and your composition figured out, put the photograph away and let your intuition take over; let your creativity guide you; let your artistic sense help you figure out where to go from there.

Suzette

*"The painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through."* (Jackson Pollock)

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**December 5, 2009**

***Learning To Play***

I wonder sometimes why it is that some artists like to try different things, new techniques, new subjects, new media, new styles, while others stick to what they do practically forever. I am of the 'try different things' group.

Those artists who stick to what they know and what they do have one advantage, they get to refine their skills and improve their work and they have a chance at becoming very accomplished.

Those of us who keep trying different things possibly lack that advantage and even though we do keep learning and improving (I hope), we don't necessarily develop the same mastery if we keep trying new media, techniques and subject matter. Or do we?

The other side of this coin is this, is there a chance that doing the same kind of work all the time may eventually result in a lack of inspiration and a lack of excitement about one's work. Where is the fun? Where's is the exploration, the experimentation?

On the other hand, those who keep trying new things have lots to play with; we keep learning new things and learn to be flexible and adaptable. We have fun and maintain the excitement and enjoy the pleasure of discovery and re-invention.

I think for some, their enjoyment comes from consistency and persistence. For others, it's the opposite, their enjoyment comes from exploration and discovery. And perhaps we all need to step out of our comfort zone once in a while in order to stretch and challenge ourselves, whether that means being more consistent, or being more playful.

As in all things in life, I think what is needed is balance. I think we all need some consistency in what we do in order to learn and improve, and become proficient. However, I believe we all need to play once in a while. We need to let our creativity run wild for a while, if only as a change of pace. Who knows what new exciting discovery we will make when we allow ourselves the freedom to play? And when we're done playing, we then go back to our regular work refreshed and re-energized.

Suzette

*"Creativity takes courage."* (Henri Matisse)

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**December 22, 2009**      ***Peace and Love***

My wish for all of us this Christmas is for Peace and Love.

Christmas time is such a busy time, so stressful. We do so many things not so much because we want to but because we feel we have to. I myself would wish for a simpler kind of Christmas, but in this day and age, that may not be possible any more.

So for this Christmas and for the year ahead, please enjoy the little things in life, slow down and take the time to relax, make more time for the things you enjoy and try to reduce those things that you do because you have to.

PEACE AND LOVE.

Suzette

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