

Bridget Galway
The art of Rebecca Bleecher

Rebecca Bleecher is an artist and a friend that I have known since 1984. We first met as fellow art students at Umass Amherst.

Rebecca started her formal pursuit of the arts as a printmaking major studying with renowned print artist Jack Coughlin. She was highly acknowledged for her wood cuts because of the unique and imaginative subjects she chose and her ability to create an intense and striking quality of light through her cutting technique.

Although she continued to develop her printmaking skills in woodcut, intaglio, and lithography, Rebecca decided to switch her major to painting. However she continued to excel in all mediums, including ceramics.

Her paintings are always full of color, often reminiscent of Gauguin. They are mainly of people that imbue a sense of passion, romance, and sometimes very intimate, when shown through her portrayal of solitary figures lost in thought.

After college Rebecca continued to expand as an artist. While exhibiting her work in several galleries, she also taught painting, ceramics and printmaking in her home.

Always interested in helping people, she decided to pursue a degree in Occupational therapy. This was of course coupled with the well known fact that most artists must find a way to supplement their income.

For a while she had to put her art on the back burner so she could be immersed on that new path. Her need to create art was an ache she could not pacify, she knew she had to find away to integrate these two passions. During her time as an Occupational Therapist in both physical and mental health she began taking acupressure courses and meditating. This was when her true healing gifts began to open up leading to her present practice as a Shamanic healer.

Rebecca's ability to merge these two aspects of who she is has defined her as a true Renaissance woman.

Rebecca Bleecher's art has never stopped evolving, and has done so in perfect cadence with all the changes she has been open to trying.

Her most recent work is a blend of abstract images and images reflecting her experience as a physical and spiritual healer. Her most recent work focuses on commissioned oil and watercolor paintings of an individual's personal Spirit Guide.

Rebecca is someone that has always been full of energy and excitement about new endeavors, and has taken them on fearlessly. It is this that manifests an endless inspiration for ones creative expression, and so it is no wonder that Rebecca's art continues to change and evolve from her limitless desire to expand her horizons.

I will say no more, for she will fill in the rest with her own words, I can only say that she has been a source of inspiration for me, both as an artist and a person who puts forth an abundance of positive energy into the world.

An Artist's Journey to Spirituality

When Bridget called with the opportunity to present a retrospective of my artwork for the WHL Review, I realized that my journey toward a Spiritual healing path could be witnessed in my works of art.

My path to becoming a Spiritual healer and artist has been an eye opening experience. I contemplated whether it was too "out there" to write about in this article. But alas, it is my story, so here it goes.

As a child I had many interests ranging from art, nature and swimming to gymnastics. My favorite gifts were always art supplies and my dreams were always of flying and saving people. My family wasn't religious and I knew nothing of "God". In my teens my best friend and I would debate God vs. Science. I was science and thought she was gullible. My father was an engineer and artistic as well as being a declared atheist who was open to the idea of reincarnation, and my mother a social worker. I embraced aspects of both worlds.

My Shamanic connection to animals and nature began early on as I enjoyed spending time in the woods and felt particularly connected to reptiles and amphibians. At the age of three I began camping with my family in upstate New York. At age nine I remember spending time alone in the woods behind our home in Massachusetts, connecting with the small animals and birds

Throughout my childhood, my love of art was encouraged and praise by my family, friends, and teachers. At fourteen my parents divorced and my interest in art stopped for almost a 3 year period. Although this was an emotional time for me, getting involved with my daughter's father at 15, skipping school and experimenting with various drugs, it was also one of the most "alive" times of my life and I wouldn't change the adventures for anything.

At 16 I became pregnant with my daughter Vanessa. This was a major turning point in my life, and surprisingly, it got my life back on track. I transferred to the School Age Mother's Program (SAM's) in Worcester, MA. to complete my Junior year. This is where I rediscovered my art. I remember drawing a fox one day with pastels and being so surprised to remember that I had a talent for art.

I applied to UMASS in Amherst, MA. and received a Bachelor Degree in Fine Art. This is also where I met Bridget Galway. Both of us single mothers with children of the same age living in the family housing. At UMASS, I started out as a printmaking major studying with Jack Coughlin and William Patterson then switched my major to painting during my third year, working closely with John Grillo, Leonel Gongora, Nelson Stevens, and Walter Kaymes. John Grillo and Jack Coughlin were on my thesis committee. I was also very interested in psychology and took many classes, ending up with enough for a minor.

During my Junior year of college I had several exhibitions in local venues and one exhibition at the Jones Library in Amherst. This was the most prolific time of my life. I loved meeting the people who bought my work and I was enjoying a lot of success with sales. In 1989, I began being

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1

representation by R. Michelson Galleries in Amherst and Northampton. I have since enjoyed a long-time relationship with the gallery that continues to this day. During my time with R. Michelson Gallery I have been most recognized for my tango dancers with blue faces and large figurative paintings and charcoals.

Eventually I decided that my finances were too inconsistent and I needed to get a “real” job. I had no idea what I wanted to do. Art had been my life. I finally decided for lack of a better idea to get a Master’s Degree in Business at Western New England College. You can always use a business degree for something. Right? I completed my first year then ran out of money. During my time off someone mentioned that as an Occupational therapist you could combine art (in the mental health field) and medical practices (in physical rehab). I had at times considered pursuing a medical degree. I was sold and pursued a degree in O.T. I ended up with a position on two units at Noble Hospital in Westfield, MA., the Bronson Rehab Unit (inpatient physical rehab) and the Partial Program (outpatient mental health). This was my first introduction to being a healer. On the Partial Program I often used expressive arts for awareness and healing.

During my time as an Occupational Therapist I began meditating and attending courses in Aminah Raheem’s Process Acupressure. I learned about the chakras (energy systems in the body) and began to teach chakra balancing as a way to relax the body. During one of the acupressure courses at the Cape we were working outside on a totally gray day and I was sure the sun had come out, as I saw a bright light and warmth fill my body as one of the students practiced on me. When I opened my eyes the sky was still a gray stew. That night I had my first “vision”. I was wide awake sitting up in bed at the Bed and Breakfast. The room was pitch black. Suddenly I saw a bright light like a crystal lit from inside floating before me. It began heading toward me and entered my head between my eye brows (third eye). I watched as my chest began heaving uncontrollably. What was happening? Then a huge release happened in my chest and I sobbed uncontrollably for almost two hours. I had always been someone who rarely cried and kept my emotions firmly in check. This was so strange. The next day after being up all night I felt totally refreshed and clear.

This began an extremely ungrounded period in my life of having premonitions, entities (discarnate beings) moving through me, talking in “tongues”, and receiving psychic visions and enlightenments. I received a lot of support during this time from my long-time boyfriend, Dave and the teachers and assistants associated with Process Acupressure. I have always been a curious person and this was exciting for me to discover that there is really something else out there. I was a proclaimed agnostic who finally experienced “God”. I continued with my job as an O.T. but had begun offering healing sessions after work and on the weekends. I began working closely with a Shamanic Spiritual Guide, Chief Running Star, (of the Spiritual realm, not a physical person) who worked through me for healing and taught me about energy healing. I decided that I needed more structure and began taking Shamanic courses as well as continuing my acupressure path and Reiki.

I began Energy Medicine School at the Institute for Healing Arts and

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1

Sciences in Connecticut, which was based upon the teachings of Barbara Brennen. There I met Richard Marcus, a first year teacher who offered Shamanic journeying to his students. During my first journey, I had an enormous experience with retrieving my Power animal (Eagle) and opened to working with Spiritual animals for healing. I later went through a Shamanic training program with Cie Simurro of Shelburne Falls, MA. During that time Spirit gave me my medicine name "Buffalo Star Heart" and I began making shamanic healing tools out of branches, feathers, crystals fur, etc.

Throughout this whole journey I continued painting and can see my journey clearly reflected in the progression of my work.



1) "Illusions", hand-colored woodcut, 12" X 16" was one of my first pieces at UMASS. There is a woman daydreaming, waiting for the "Illusion" to clear, to feel deeper meaning and connection to life. There must be more out there.

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1



2) "Illusions II", charcoal, approx. 24" X 30", began a period of fascination with the distortions in a fishbowl inspired by Matisse's fishbowl. A metaphor for the meaning of life with its distortions and illusions vs. truth and clarity.



3) "Tango", charcoal, 42"X 30", and



4) "The Woman in Red", watercolor, approx. 40"X 26", are both part of a Tango series featuring a woman called, "The Woman in Red". Unable to connect with her partner she is always looking outside to find what will allow her to feel connected and satisfied inside.



5) "Tango on Blue Tiles", watercolor, approx. 42"X 32", A later piece, after my Awakening, focuses on the couple in the background. The woman's eyes are closed indicating that she is now able to look within. She is engaged with her partner, their chests connecting energetically at the heart.



6) "Buenas Noches", oil on canvas, 48"X48", an earlier piece, and the woman's eyes are closed connecting with the night. The moonlight casts a shadow on the floor through the window. The moon symbolizes feminine intuition and illusion.



7) "Siesta with Cat", watercolor and acrylic on paper, approx. "30X 40", shows a woman at the beach in search of healing. An animal companion has shown up for comfort and the water represents the emotions.



8) "Desert Bride", oil on masonite, 45"X 29", is a very personal piece completed after a trip to New Mexico. It shows a bride alone, because although I am in a long-term committed relationship, I have never dreamed that I would be married. This woman is married to her "Path".



9) "Island Song", oil on canvas, 48"X 48", completed after a trip to Hawaii, although prior to my "awakening", this woman dreams of Spirit, a precursor of what is to come.

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1

The next six pieces are more recent works.



10) "Heaven Right Here", mixed medium with oil on wood, 12" X 12", based on a song by Jeb Loy Nichols, this piece represents an amazing summer day when all was right in the world. I had taken the day off from work on the clearest, most beautiful day. I relaxed in the water of my adult sized, blow up, wading pool blasting Jeb Loy Nichols on my stereo and connected with EVERYTHING. This is an aerial view of my home and the pool. I truly realized, "Heaven's Right Here" and I was totally joyful and content in that moment.



11) "Shamanic Journey", oil, 12" X 16", Painted after I began practicing Soul Retrieval work. Depicts a different dimension.

12) "Carnelian Sky", mixed medium on plaster, 12"X 6", painted during the time of my psychic opening. The black and white of the houses represents the split that I felt between the dark and light energies in my body, mind, and spirit.





13) "The Seeker", oil on canvas, 28"X 24", and This piece was painted over an earlier work titled, "Contemplating the Future" and later evolved into this healer who finds the answers for both herself and others through her gifts and connection to Spirit. Her ring with the 6 pointed star is symbolic of the Elements (I am presently teaching Elemental Shamanism), as well as representing the union of all that is Above and Below



14) "Love and Peace", oil on canvas, 19"X 29", features a Goddess that embraces Dove energy of wholeness, love, and peace. This is an energy that I channel in my healing practice.



15) "Nephtys", oil on canvas, 66"X 30", a Spiritual Guide with the energy of the High Priestess of the Tarot cards. Her third eye is wide open. She has esoteric knowledge and is connected to the Universe. The owl wing represents her ability to see what is hidden and in her hand she holds a sailboat on the sea representing the journey of life. I often dream of the tarot.

The artist may be reached at rebelartista@comcast.net