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Pam Rosenblatt

Somerville artist Jane Sherrill and her seascapes



On Thursday, May 1, 2014, Somerville artist Jane Sherrill emailed **Wilderness House Literary Review's** arts editor Pam Rosenblatt after reading a call for artists written on Somerville Open Studios' Facebook site the day before. Sherrill included her artist statement and several images of her paintings in this introductory email. Rosenblatt reviewed Sherrill's artist statement and the attached digital images.

A short time later, Rosenblatt emailed Sherrill back and requested an interview with her re: her seascape paintings; Sherrill accepted this opportunity. On Thursday, May 21, 2014, the two women met at Sherrill's art studio building, and the arts interview was held. **Wilderness House Literary Review** hopes you enjoy the resulting article!

There are many colors on the color spectrum wheel, yet it's still a challenge to many artists to mix and alter the tones of these paint colors to match what their mind's eye is picturing. Color hues are usually achieved through combining water, paint thinner, and/or paint colors together. Color hues can also be accomplished by choosing the paint colors closest to the desired shade and then simply applying these hues straight from the tube. The more schooled an artist is in color theory and its application, the more likely they will be to mix hues that are unique in appearance. Therefore, a person can logically reason that the less academic training an artist has probably results in less experimentation by the artist in the blending of colors among the tubes.

Does this difference in technique suggest that a less trained artist is not as talented or gifted as an artist who has received a great deal of formal training? Wonderful question! And that's a question that Somerville artist Jane Sherrill has likely pondered. Though self-taught, Sherrill has achieved highly technical expertise in painting. Yes, she knows how to mix and experiment with colors, yet she often chooses to mix paint colors directly upon the surfaces of her paintings. To Sherrill, this process is not typical of most painters. "As a result of being self-taught, I developed my own quirky way of mixing color that was more intuitive in the moment, meaning I didn't think about it beforehand," she explained in an arts inter-



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view with *Wilderness House Literary Review* that on May 21, 2014.

Only recently has Sherrill decided “to consider and make some of these decisions beforehand,” she said. And this recent development in technique has proven to compliment the visual art of Jane Sherrill by creating an even more strengthened visual impact upon the viewer.

A Jane Sherrill seascape tends to impress the viewer with her ability to portray the range of color that exists within the water and her capacity to depict the potency of the ocean’s chaotic movement. Sherrill manages to capture the strength of the sea’s current, the structure of its undulating waves, as well as the smaller water droplets that make up its entirety. Also notable are the wonderful, scenic cloudscapes that she creates. The tension in Sherrill’s artworks often suggests ways in which opposites exist in conjunction with one another in Nature and how mankind coexists with environmental threats. The erosion of the sandy beaches in Cape Cod, New Jersey, and Long Island through evolution and/or climate change is usually represented in her work.



Sherrill’s aim is to photograph and paint these beaches before additional damage occurs. The hope exists that maybe her artworks will prevent further misfortune to happen, although she acknowledged that she isn’t certain that such a feat to be attainable.

For over 35 years, Sherrill has been an artist dealing with drawing, painting, and sculpture. It wasn’t until 2009 that she started painting seascapes in Cape Cod. She works mainly with acrylic. “People do say that I work my acrylics like oils – which is interesting to me. I get a lot of color out of them. I like acrylics. I love oils, too. But I’ve gotten into acrylics,” Sherrill discussed.



Sherrill likes to capture the movement of light, water, and weather in her paintings, some of which are on wood while others are on paper. She may create single panel artworks or they may be diptych or triptych. She uses a

vast array of brushes for each painting but especially enjoys manipulating extremely tiny brushes to show the minute water droplets of the breaking waves. Although it takes a longer time to complete each painting with

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the use of these tiny brushes, she finds that the end result reveals the details of Nature that she tries to capture.

“For me, life is stunningly gorgeous – I want to express even the tiniest details. How this amazing body of water is not one flow of energy going in the same direction but it is made up of all these droplets of water flowing ran-

domly,” Sherrill said. “I find that absolutely stunning!”

In a work-in-progress painting, tentatively titled “Above/Below, Ballston Beach”, Sherrill has painted a seascape where layer upon layer of paint builds into a sublime beach scene, where the water and the shoreline seem to recede. A sense of spirituality is attained. This unfinished piece looks realistic but also reflects Sherrill’s inner imagination.

“To me, [my paintings] are spiritual. There’s a lot of spirituality in them. [This work] is realistic but it’s not just a realistic rendering, which would be kind of dead,” she explained. Her works seems to grow from reality into the abstract, or the imaginary.



Perhaps this transcendental effect is achieved because Sherrill works from photographs of the beaches that she visits. “There are certain photographs where there’s something about the photo that really interests me. So then I crop it, cut it into shape and size [the area of the photograph that] is of interest to me. Then I might blow up that area or not. I use it in terms of colors but not completely... I work very strongly from the photos for a while until I begin to understand what the photo is saying and what it is that attracts me about the photo. And then I let that inner knowing take hold of my brush,” she said.

Many of her common themes, as well as her established stylistic methods, are reflected in the unfinished “Above/Below, Ballston Beach”. Her unique gift for varying the sun light, reflection of clouds on the ocean’s surface, differing colors of water, the chaos of water and clouds while maintain the believability of the waves characterizes her work.

Created before “Above/Below, Ballston Beach”, “Change, Ballston Beach, Truro” is a painting that again displays Sherrill’s skill for varying light and color. “Here it was a beautiful sunny day, and I was sitting on the

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beach. It was toward the end of the day. Suddenly I noticed that there was a shadow. The sun was no longer beating on the beach. So I turned around and looked at the dune.

Above I saw a dark cloud. So that's what going on [with "Change, Ballston Beach, Truro"]. The dark part from the bottom is the dune," said

Sherrill. This scene interested her, so she snapped a photograph and made the painting later on. "Change, Ballston Beach, Truro" simply resulted from a wonderful day at Ballston Beach, Truro, Massachusetts.



"Change, Ballston Beach, Truro" is significant because it shows how difficult color is to take on. "Color is almost not anything in and of itself. It's all about light. If the light doesn't hit something, you're going to see something totally different. Water, too. It's all different colors but no color. You know," she said, "color is really rough!"

Sherrill also did a Point Pleasant Beach, New Jersey series. After taking photographs and painting seascapes of this location, Hurricane Sandy struck and tore apart the beach that she immortalized through her artworks. This natural disaster deeply affected Sherrill. "It just has been feeling like, to me, that as I grow older, the world is so beautiful. I want to say, 'Look, this is what we have, look at this spectacular, gorgeousness. It's our gorgeous world that we need to care for. This [beach] was here now. Who knows what tomorrow will bring?'" she articulated.

"Wave wall, early morning, Point Pleasant" is a triptych by Sherrill that captures Point Pleasant beach before Hurricane Sandy's devastation. She was pleased that she could preserve some of Nature's "gorgeousness" through paintings like this one.

A Sherrill painting varies in size, starting from 15 inch squares up to 3 feet by 6 feet panels. Her prices reflect the two to three months that it takes her to paint them. Much patience, passion, dedication, and endurance go into the production of a Jane Sherrill artwork, and the end result proves the entire process to be worthwhile. "It's hard work," Sherrill adds. "There's no doubt about it."

