

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

Pam Rosenblatt

An interview with Painter/Drawer Allen Forrest: seeing art through life's experience and emotions

People see art through their life experience and emotions. I am not trying to communicate with any one group of people or nationality. I want everyone, all people of the world to have their unique experience when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel something special to them when they see my drawings. I want their emotional experience, their participation to finish the artwork itself. Artist Allen Forrest February 3, 2015



"Self Portrait"

WHLR: How would you like your name to appear in the Wilderness House Literary Review arts article?

AF: Allen Forrest

WHLR: Where were you born and raised?

AF: I was born in Vancouver, B.C. Canada, but I was raised in the Seattle, WA area.

WHLR: And what is your age?

AF: 60.



"Self-Portrait 3"

WHLR: When did you begin creating art? As a child or an adult?

AF: I did paint and draw as a child, but stopped and did not resume until I was 52, then I began in earnest. I was undergoing a Reichian Therapy program at the time and became so drawn to fine art that I had to do something about it. This need began my journey into the world of art.

WHLR: And are you the only artist in your family?

AF: My mother was very interested in creating art. She mostly worked in crafts and gardening, but as a young girl she liked to paint. My father is a retired mechanical engineer and he loved drafting: drawing his designs old school on a drafting board before computers came on the scene with auto-cad.

WHLR: While going through your online artwork, I noticed that the signature initials on the artworks vary. Sometimes there are no initials on the pieces; sometimes there is an "EF", "BF" or a "Forrest" on them. Who are people behind the "EF", "BF", "Forrest", and the "no initial" artworks?

AF: My full name is Brian Allen Forrest. I have started using Allen

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

Forrest as my artist name. I used to sign my pieces: Forrest or BF or AF (never EF, must be the paint distorting the initials) my last name or initials, but now I rarely sign them, except for a commission piece if the buyer wants my initials on the canvas or if it is a custom piece for a magazine.

WHLR: I have reviewed many of your paintings and drawings. You seem to be a jack-of-all-trades artist. Do you also do photography and/or sculpture? Which artistic genres are your favorites and why?

AF: I paint and draw, no sculpture and the photography I do is for subject matter/visual reference. I will travel around with my little camera and shoot landscapes or cityscapes that I think would make interesting paintings.



“Baseball Catch”

I am over my image quota! To see my later and latest work you need to either check my Twitter (@artgrafiken) or my art blog: artgrafiken.blogspot.ca

WHLR: What is the process that you go through to make an oil painting, an acrylic painting, a watercolor, and a drawing? And how long does it take? [I’m thinking of “Piano” and “Self-Portrait” and “Bird of Paradise” and “Baseball Catch”, etc.]

AF: A drawing (or work on paper) may be completed in as little as 20-50 minutes. A painting may be completed in 4-6 hours over 3-4 days, each day as a new layer is added as I walk deeper into the canvas and the subject. An acrylic painting would be somewhere in the middle, time-wise, since the paint dries so quickly. My favorite mediums are: oil paint, ink, oil pastel, and gouache.

WHLR: Many of your paintings and sketches have a Vincent Willem van Gogh (1853-1890) appearance. The paintings are colorfully layered with paint, with images that are a bit distorted but recognizable in an



“Bird of Paradise”

WHLR: There are a lot of your paintings and drawings on the fineartamerica.com website. You are very prolific. Do you know the exact number of paintings (oils versus acrylic versus watercolor) and the exact number of drawings that you have done?

AF: No, probably over a 1,000 including drawings. I add new ones every week, but my Fine Art America site has older work. Since they won’t let me upload any more,



“Baseball Hit”

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

avant-garde and post-impressionist painterly fashion. How do you achieve this effect? And why stylize many of your paintings after van Gogh?

AF: I am interested in feeling. That is always my guide: how I feel about the subject. I find that I am drawn to distortion of the image in art. This distortion accentuates the emotion of the piece for me. Since the image isn't always spelled out in detail, the viewer must fill in the blanks and get involved. I am flattered that you think I am trying to emulate van Gogh, but I am not. It is just how I paint or draw. I think it is the bold use of color and the many landscapes that reminds you of van Gogh. Perhaps some are very close to his style, but I think if you put most of them side by side with a van Gogh, you would only see slight similarity and far more differences.



"Baseball Disagreement"

WHLR: What colors do you enjoy working with the most? And why?

AF: I love to pit compliments against one another, green against red or orange against blue, yellow and purple, etc. and get a vibration going. For values, I like high contrast as well. But a particular color?--Yellow is very nice, like the warmth of the sun--whoops, that was Vincent's favorite too...



"Old West Gamblers 2"

WHLR: Please cite three favorite paintings that you created and explain why you are keen on them.

AF: I just did a 3 piece set depicting views of 3 street corners at an intersection in the University District of Seattle, WA. I love the impasto quirky style I have evolved to in these. I can't explain it. I just get this little grin on my face. I love these paintings.

WHLR: Do you have any mentors or teachers whom you would like to mention?

AF: I am mostly self-taught, but when I began I studied at the local college where I was living at the time, in their continuing education art program. I had some good teachers for the basics: Emmett McLaughlin for painting and color theory and Amanda Schaffer for anatomy and drawing. Most of the other classes I had were one-offs, but those two teachers really started the ball rolling for me.

WHLR: Besides van Gogh, are there any artists who have influenced your artwork?

AF: Too many to name off the top of my head, but I'll give it a go: Ben Shahn, Terry St. John, William Steig, The Society of Six, particularly: Seldon Gile, August Gay, Bernard von Eichman, The Group of Seven, Thom Thompson, Romare Bearden, Robert Crumb, Judy Molyneux, Richard Diebenkorn, David Park, Ursula O'Farrell, Francis Bacon, Claude Monet,

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1

Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Rembrandt, August Macke, Franz Kline, Alexej Jawlensky, Oskar Kokoschka, Mark Rothko, Lyonel Feininger...the list goes on.

WHLR: How does your artwork - especially your drawings of the baseball players, the characters of the Wild West, the eight people on the non-moving but balanced bicycle - reflect society today? Why did you create these characters? And, in your drawings and paintings, do you intend to show cultural differences in Canadian society as compared to the United States society? Or does your

visual art creations suggest that people all over the world, focusing mainly on North America, are similar?



“Blues Singer Billie Holiday”



“Vincent van Gogh at the Easel”

front of a vast audience, much like in the classical Greek tradition, also baseball has a history and reverence, it is like a religion to some. If I see an image that interests me, makes me really feel something, then I may want to draw or paint it and in interpreting this subject matter stylistically, what you call “a bit distorted but recognizable in an avant-garde and post-impressionist painterly fashion”, my feelings and emotions will go right into the paint, or ink, or whatever medium I am using. I have had many people tell me things they felt or saw in my work and I may have had no intention of creating that, but “they” see or feel it and that is great, it is “their” experience that the painting has brought about. People see art through their life experience and emotions. I am not trying to communicate with any one group of people or

AF: As I mentioned before I am drawn to things I have feeling for. I am fascinated with old photographs, before people really understood what the camera was. Their poses are so basic and straight, just stating what they are and not what they are not. The bicycle drawing is from my Berlin in the 1920’s, a period and place in history that I find fascinating. Berlin in the 20s was a wild creative center for art and science. The Nazis had not taken over yet, the Weimar Republic was struggling to hold on to power amidst record inflation and unemployment—yet it was a very creative time for the city, far ahead of its contemporaries. I did the baseball drawings because of the theatricality of the sport, the showmanship, conflicts played out on stage in



“Vincent van Gogh Phantom on the Road”

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/1



nationality. I want everyone, all people of the world to have their unique experience when they look at my paintings. I want them to feel something special to them when they see my drawings. I want their emotional experience, their participation to finish the artwork itself.

WHLR: Where has your artwork been published?

AF: An occasional book cover, but mostly magazines: Tidal Basin Press, EAB Publishing, Under The Gum Tree, New Plains Review, Maudlin House, Crack the Spine, The Writing Disorder, Plume Poetry, Blotterature, Nazar Look, Sliver of Stone Magazine, Pilgrimage Press, Cortland Review, Horizons Magazine, Buffalo Almanack, Thrice Fiction, Ijagun Poetry Journal, and many, many more. I also have 14 paintings from my Bel Red series in the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection, in Bellevue, WA.

WHLR: Do you work on commission?

AF: Yes, my prices are extremely reasonable, I charge a basic graphic designers rate, I have posted examples of my commission work at my blog.

WHLR: How many paintings have you sold?

AF: I no longer keep track, but I would imagine around 150+.

WHLR: And how many drawings have you sold?

AF: 10 originals/hard copies, the rest were HiRes images I emailed for the buyer to print on their choice of photographic paper and then frame.

WHLR: Where do you see your artwork headed?

AF: The unknown, new frontiers, the sky's the limit, who knows? I will continue exploring doing my revisited series of difference artists and periods in history, more land and cityscapes, and of course figurative work.

WHLR: Do you have any words of advice for aspiring visual artists?

AF: Don't let anybody else decide whether you have talent or not. You decide. Ask the yourself: Do I have talent as an artist? The answer? What do you want it to be? Yes or no? That is the answer. You decide, don't let anyone else make that decision for you. Anyone can be a great artist, but few want to be. That is the crux of it. You have to WANT it. You have to be a bulldog and keep pulling at that leash day after day until it breaks and you are free. Even when you are down and tired, don't stop completely, keep going. On those days when you have no time to work at your art, still try to fit in a little time. As writer Charles Bukowski used to say, keep the ember alive, don't let it go out. Some days I can only get one little drawing



"First Nation 2"



"Vancouver Chinatown 6"

done, it's not much, but the ember is still glowing and waiting for a time when it will explode into a creative fire.

Allen Forrest's Bio:

Born in Canada and bred in the U.S., Allen Forrest has worked in many mediums: computer graphics, theater, digital music, film, video, drawing and painting. Allen studied acting in the Columbia Pictures Talent Program in Los Angeles and digital media in art and design at Bellevue College (receiving degrees in Web Multimedia Authoring and Digital Video Production.) He currently works in the Vancouver, Canada, as a

graphic artist and painter. He is the winner of the Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's Reed Magazine and his Bel Red painting series is part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection. Forrest's expressive drawing and painting style is a mix of avant-garde expressionism and post-Impressionist elements reminiscent of van Gogh, creating emotion on canvas.



"Vancouver BC Gastown 3"



"Green Timbers Urban Forest"