

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

Pam Rosenblatt

### The “futuristic” style of artist Crystal Berche

*On July 7, 2014, Wilderness House Literary Review emailed artist/poet Chrystal Berche several intensive interview questions. A few days later, Berche emailed her detailed answers back to WHLR arts editor Pam Rosenblatt. Rosenblatt read the completed interview and edited it as an arts interview piece for*

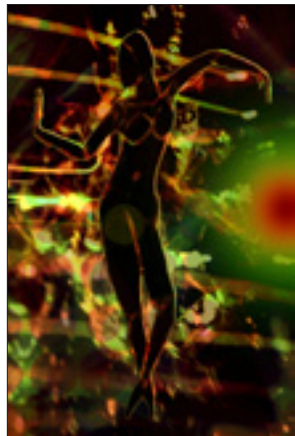
*Wilderness House Literary Review’s autumn 2014 issue. We think you will appreciate it!*

WHLR: How would you like your name printed in the *Wilderness House Literary Review* article?

CB: As Chrystal Berche

WHLR: Where were you born and raised? And where do you currently reside? Did you attend college? If yes, where did you go?

CB: I was born in York, PA in 1976, but I was raised all over the world. My parents were both Navy, and so I was fortunate enough to live in Key West Florida; the Island of Guam; and Upper Marlboro, Maryland before my mother retired from Service. I went to high school in New Bedford, Massachusetts at New Bedford High School which had a wonderful art program, although I spent more of my time as a part of the JROTC than I did pursuing art classes. But I was fortunate enough to take a few art classes during my time there.

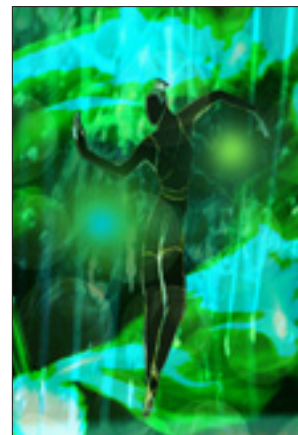


I have attended college twice: The first time was at Norwich University in Northfield, Vermont where I double majored in Criminal Justice and English; and the second time was through the Art institute of Pittsburg’s online division where I majored in media arts and animation.

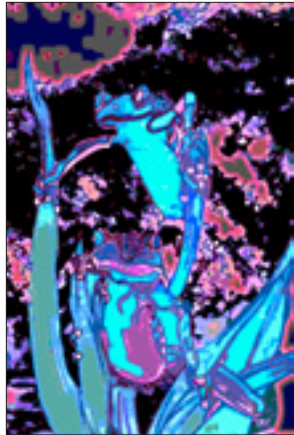
Currently I reside in Osage, a beautiful small town in North Central Iowa not too far from the Minnesota border. Since high school I have seen every state on the east coast and a good chunk of the south as well. While I have found that my travels have been extremely valuable to me as an author and an artist, my children have grown up here in Osage and this is home for them. I still travel as often as I can. But, since coming to Osage, I feel like this is home. It is the most inspiring place that I have ever lived.

WHLR: What is your primary occupation?

CB: Photography and Crafts. I work as a freelance photographer. During the spring, summer,



## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3



and fall, I set up a small table or booth at various festivals and sell my artwork, photography, beaded necklaces and other creations. I also teach martial arts classes at our Tae Kwon Do Dojang and will be teaching two writing courses in the spring.

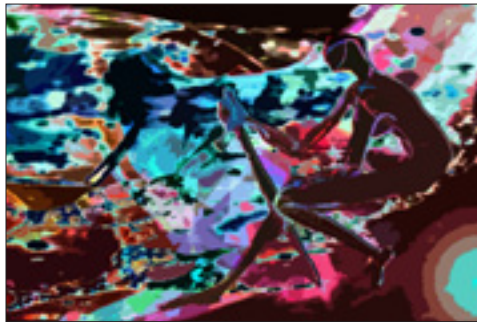
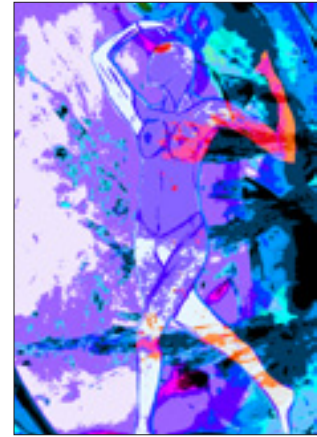
WHLR: When did your interest in visual art begin?

CB: I've been drawing since I was a small child. In fact, I still have the sketchbook I got for my eighth birthday and it is filled with efforts at duplicating cartoon characters and various animals. Spending time in museums was another favorite past time as was spending hours just looking through some of the different art books that laid

around the house as I was growing up. When I got my first digital camera, at age twenty-seven, it came with photo enhancing software. Once I started playing with it, I was hooked.

WHLR: What types of art do you create?

CB: I first started making art with the help of my computer: scanning in drawings of fairies and dragons and layering them on digitally enhanced photos that I had taken. I started to learn what combination of filters and enhancements created which effects. From there, I began to take photographs of things like bubbles and incense smoke, neon lights, glow sticks, clouds and campfires and to use them to create backgrounds for my drawings. I also create backgrounds from digitally enhanced paintings that I have done. The paintings would be considered mixed media, since there is often glass, feathers, and tissue paper also affixed to the canvas, either on top of the paint, or beneath it to create texture.



I guess you could call the type of artwork that I do a hybrid style of multi-media artwork, since on any given piece, you will find a minimum of two disciplines in play. The central figures of my artwork are always hand drawn using pencil, col-erase, chalk, charcoal or ink, while the backgrounds typically start out as two sets of three different photographs layered on one another with various effects applied to each layer. In addition, I have created

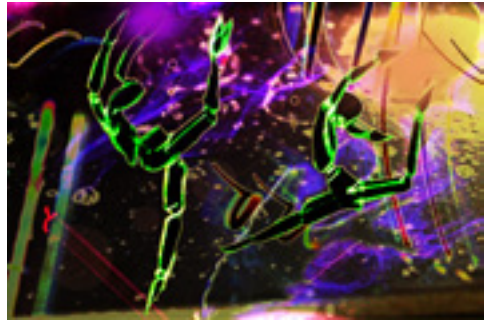
several pieces of artwork that contain various lines from my poetry woven through the image.

WHLR: And please name three of your favorite pieces and explain why they are your "favorites".

CB: My three 'favorite' pieces are actually from three very different col-

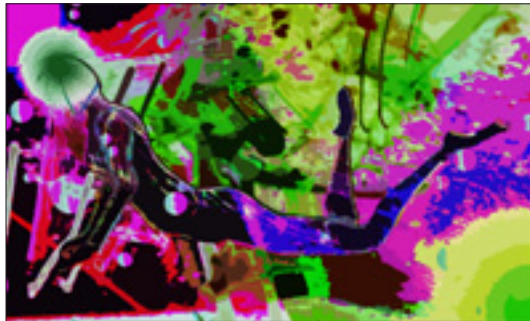
## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

lections that I have created. From my Frogs and Freedom collection there is an image titled "Frogs Electric", which is of two frogs peering through long blades of grass, one practically standing on the other's head. The neon light behind them crackles like electricity and the thing I love the most about this artwork, is that the neon light gives an almost otherworldly appearance to the frogs.



From **Tiny Dancers**, my favorite artwork is titled "Absinthe Dance". The thing that I love is that it was the first time I was able to create the watercolor effect that appears in some of the other dancer images as well. Before that piece, I had often been able to achieve a neon look, but nothing where the colors bled together like they were painted on. Each time I look at this piece, I am reminded of how much time and effort went into learning how to create it, and I feel a rush of pride at having accomplished such an artwork.

My third favorite piece is from **A Study In Gestures**, which was actually the second collection of artwork created. It is titled "Weathered Storm" and it depicts a swordswoman at rest, with swirls of color in the background, the swirls actually giving the impression of smoke rising up off of a battlefield, yet the swordswoman's pose is thoughtful, relaxed and reflective. I just fell in love with the contrast of those two ideas and the image itself.



WHLR: Your artwork that you emailed to *Wilderness House Literary Review* is unusually vibrant with neon-looking colors and usually there's the form of a naked woman often painted amidst the colorful setting. How do you achieve these colors and images? Is it by route of a computer program? [Or, more

simply, what is the process used in creating an artwork?] And why create the figure of the naked woman among all of those "wild" colors?

CB: The interesting part of the **Dancers** and **Gestures** collections was that the figures came first. After I finished taking all of the drawing courses that I was required to take as a media arts and animation major, I found myself with this big pile of one, three and five minute gesture study sketches. I didn't know what to do with them at first, so I put them aside for about a year. Then, when I was reorganizing my studio place, I found them again and sat down. I tried to decide what I wanted to do with them.

It seemed like a shame to just shove the sketches back in the file cabinet and forget about them. So I scanned the works in and layered them on different backgrounds. Finally, I came across a combination of backgrounds that just seemed to mesh with the poses I had chosen to draw in class. The base layer of the backgrounds is photographs of bubbles that were

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

blown in a dark room and landed on a cookie sheet. I used a flashlight as the only light source and took pictures of the bubbles while they were clumped and popping. On top of the bubble layer, I layered a photo of incense smoke taken against a black backdrop with candle light providing the only light to illuminate the smoke. Once colors were what I wanted them to be, I layered the gesture study drawing on top, usually making it opaque enough that some of the swirl went right through the figure and became a part of it. Some of the figures are inverted and some of the images are inverted, depending on whether I wanted a dark piece with bright neon colors, or a lighter piece with bright pastel colors.

I use a combination of photoshop and coral effects to finish off each piece and really make the colors eye catching and vibrant. As for why so "wild", I guess, in many ways, the colors remind me of the cities I have known: bright, vibrant, alive and electric. And most of the women that I have known in my life are the same way. I didn't want to show the dancers as tired or sad, even when weary or depressed. I wanted there to be an echo of that same bright shimmer behind them as there was on the more exciting pieces. I feel as if the wild colors suggest an energy level present even when the figures are not in motion, but still and trapped on the page.



WHLR: You wrote to us in an email that you have only been submitting your artwork to publications since January 2014. To which publications have your work been accepted to?

CB: My artwork has been accepted to and appeared and/or will be appearing in *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*, *Vivid Visions*, *Gravel*, *Commonline Journal*, *CURA*, *Former People*, *Epiphany Magazine*, *Turks Head Review*, *Collision*, *Mad Hatter Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Enhance*, *Golf Stream Literary Magazine*, *The New Yorker Press*, *Spry*, *Grey Sparrow*, *Glassworks Magazine*, *Carhoodaloodaling*, *S/tick*, *Rufous City Review*, *Star\*Line*, *Up the Staircase*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and *Drunk Monkey*.

WHLR: Who are some of your favorite artists? Why?

CB: It's funny, because, while my own creations are so bright and vivid, I have always been attracted to darker pieces of work. My favorite artists are Frank Frazetta (1928 - 2010), Boris Vallejo (1941 - ) and Albrecht Durer (1471 - 1528).

I love Frazetta's fantasy art, the strong warriors, the fierce creatures, the beautiful warrior maidens and the desperate worlds they all lived in. I am a huge fan of fantasy art and I grew up with many of his images on my walls. These are the pieces that inspired me as a teenager to keep on drawings even when other activities threatened to get in the way of my artwork, and these are the images that now, as an adult, I still look at for inspiration.

Vallejo's work, like Frazetta's, was filled with powerful figures and striking worlds and details, oh the details in each figure and creature. They just seem ready to jump off the page. I love his use

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3



of shadow and shading to bring out the moods of his characters as well as the details in them. They set a tone. When you look at the images, you can really see where he captures moments in mid motion, giving his fantasy pieces a beautifully lifelike appearance.

Durer's engravings have fascinated me from the first time I saw a photograph of one of them in an art book. Studying him in art history and having the chance to look at so many other pieces of his work just enhanced my appreciation for his style and detail. I am a bit drawn to the macabre and I love the elements that appear in so many pieces of his work.

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WHLR: Who were the major influences in your artistic career?

CB: Out of all the questions, this one was the hardest. I never really saw the type of work that I do before I started doing it, so I can't say that stylistically anyone has been a real influence on me. It's more like I have had a great many inspiring individuals in my life who have encouraged me to do what I loved, to not conform to anyone else's thoughts about what I should be doing with my time and talent, and to just have fun. Most of all, that's really been what influenced me to pursue a career in art and photography. I wanted to have fun. I wanted to wake up in the morning and be happy to leap out of bed and be productive.

If I had to name someone who has been the biggest inspiration on me as an artist, it would be my father, Robert Berche. When I think about all the amazing things that he is able to build with his hands, from motorcycles to kitchen tables, it's just awe inspiring. And then when you add in the fact that he draws portraits ....



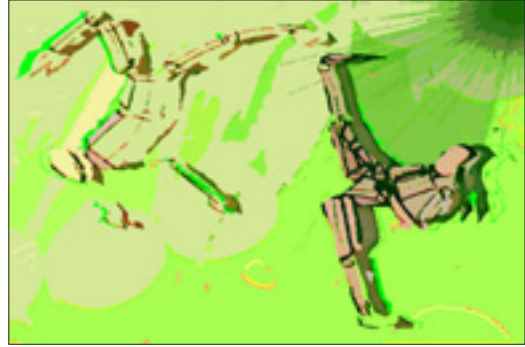
As an artist of any sort, you are always going to have people who view what you do as a hobby rather than a profession, so I consider it a blessing that I live with and am surrounded by people who don't blink when I run out the door at midnight chasing pictures of heat lightning and don't laugh when I open up a notebook in the middle of lunch or a movie and jot down the idea that tumbled through my head so I don't lose it. In fact, my children have even gotten involved, especially my daughter. When it comes to the artwork, she strikes dance poses for me so I can draw more gestures. She is very quick to give her opinions on color schemes and effects if she happens to be hanging out in my studio while I am creating.

WHLR: Which colors do you like to work with the most in your artworks? Why?

CB: Any and all shades of green, purple, and aqua are my absolute

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

favorites to work with. I love the moods that those colors can be used to create. I love that you can show so much emotion with them: from exuberant hues, which many people feel is a warm emotion, to utter desolation hues, which is indicative of how cool those colors can run. They are also my favorite colors, in general. At times I have had to remind myself that perhaps I had too much of those colors in a collection and need to work with other combinations of tones in future compilations.



WHLR: Where do you see your artwork headed in the future? Will it always be so wonderfully “futuristic”?

CB: I’ve recently finished the backgrounds for the next collection of pieces planned. I will be trying for a more tie-dyed effect than a neon one. After the completion of this set, which I’m shooting to finish in late fall, I’ve been challenged to do something a bit darker while still sticking to my merging layers of photographs. I will be attempting a horror set, using far more muted and subdued tones. I don’t know what direction my artwork will head in after this group is done, although the “futuristic” is by far my favorite style to work in.

