

*"My life has
to be very
positive.*

*I have to take
everything
negative and
turn it into
positive."*

Seka Owen
October 9, 2010



Seka in her studio.

The Invisible World

by Greg Pyra

Hearing something of distinguished artist Seka Owen's life, I am reminded of the title of Rollo May's inspirational work on creativity, *The Courage to Create*. Writing in the 1960s, when the

United States experienced civil unrest coupled with the threat of atomic warfare, he writes "to live with sensitivity in this age of limbo indeed requires courage." Citing philosophers like Sartre and Camus, who examined intensely the affects of WWII on the human psyche, he advises that "courage is not the absence of despair; it is, rather the capacity to move ahead in spite of despair." Apart from personal struggles which all of us experience as artists, consider now loss of country and family in the after effects of war.

The tremendous artistic energy sparked by the migration of avant-garde European artists to New York during WWII is well known. Less well known or acknowledged is the impetus for abstraction as practised by such artists as Rothko or Newman. Owen, like these artists, viewed abstraction as a repudiation of the past, of the horrors of war. There was great social upheaval in the world and this was reflected in their art.



Pictograph, Homage to Inuit Art, 2006, 22" x 15"

I first spoke to Carole Bondaroff by phone on Thanksgiving weekend. It sounded like she had a full house so I assumed that I had interrupted their family dinner; instead, it was an art show, in their home, the culmination of their European travels during the spring and summer of 2010. I arranged to meet Carole and her husband Stan Phelps in their Calgary home to view the art produced on their trip.

Carole, a BFA graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and a long time ASA member, is a printmaker and watercolourist. Stan Phelps (BFA from the University of Calgary) is a printmaker, painter and muralist. Both are also very active in art education. They are coproprietor of the Heart Studio situated



Stan and Carole

coast then continued on to Greece where they painted, visited ruins and drew inspiration for the mythological etchings that they had pre-sold in Canada.

Draw, Paint, Draw, Paint

by Edie McIntyre

in the Kensington area of Calgary where they have lived and offered art classes, workshops, exhibitions and other special events for over 30 years.

Their European adventure began at the end of April in Cambridge, England where their son is studying for his doctorate degree. Within days of arriving, Carole ran in the London Marathon, finishing 41 out of 2001 women in her age category. They started painting the next day. From the mainland they traveled to Holland by ferry, then continued on to Barcelona by train. They spent six weeks painting every day along the Spanish

Having realized beforehand that such an extended art trip meant giving up about five months of income, Carole and Stan came up with a novel idea to partially fund their travels—they decided to pre-sell a series of eight etchings based on the theme of the Greek muses. They made up a chart much like a calendar (*below left*): a grid of thirty spaces was headed by the name of a muse. Interested people could choose a muse by title, and for \$100, they were promised an etching before year's end. Carole said that people responded well to the mystery and intrigue of the process.

Stan had many ideas for the muses upon their return to Calgary, and spent three weeks sketching, drawing and revising, taking the drawings from rough ideas to mid-stage. The couple then travelled to Val David, Quebec to make use of a nontoxic print studio (zinc sulfate is used as an etching salt).

A further ten days were spent refining the drawings, which "needed to have very clean lines, to be in a very refined state," says Stan, before he turned them over to Carole to begin the extensive etching process. It was a joint effort. "Once I started getting my lines on the plate, we collaborated, which is a rare thing for us. We exchange ideas openly enough, but rarely do we ever work on the same plate together."

A suite of eight detailed etchings with **thirty** original prints of each should have taken months. Carole said that the people at the studio, "figured we'd be there eight months, but we only had four weeks: we basically had to make good use of our time out there, we were working 14 to 16 hours a day."



Muse chart



Swan Song



Athena Rising

The eight etchings represent approximately 1000 hours of work. The other artists at the Val David studio, some of whom purchased prints, were impressed with their work output; they called them “the little Anglophone machines.” Carole and Stan said they felt that they had brought a new energy with them, helping to revitalize the studio.

At present Carole and Stan are in distribution mode. They are devoting two weekends to this end. One of each of the muses hangs on display in their home; their interpretations of the classical muses are beautiful, original, imaginative and whimsical. *Swan Song* (above left) portrays the Muse of Song, Polyhymnia harmonizing with the birds. The piece has a definite avian theme; the urn’s handles have become swan’s necks, the lyre and her hand are swan-like as well.

Athena Rising (above right) is a tribute to Clio, the Muse of History. The warrior goddess Athena is rising from a shell, her owl perched on her arm, the muses are dancing around, each one holding their symbol, a great conflagration below. Urania, the muse of astronomy is portrayed in *Night Sky* (below right). Zeus is sprinkling the sky with stars; the four muses represent the elements: fire, water, earth and sky.

In addition to researching the muses, they were journaling, drawing and painting for three months, watercolours for Carole and oils for Stan. Their output was prolific and some of the paintings done in Spain and Greece, *en plein air*, hang near the muses. “We’ve been having shows in our house for over thirty years; our kids grew up in an art gallery, an art school.” Working thus out of their home, they did not have to worry about childcare. Over the years, their children accompanied them on similar trips to Europe and Mexico.

“So it was draw, paint, draw, paint,” Carole said in passing to describe the frenetic pace of their art making in Europe, but I think it might describe their life in Calgary. As well as being

active and prolific artists and offering classes in their home for over thirty years, they have done a lot of work with the province, being involved with the AFA’s Artist in Residency program since 1986. Carole works two days a week in a school for emotionally handicapped children. Stan does beautiful murals all over the province with school children and for communities. He is the artist in residence at the Historic Perrenoud Ranche Art Centre west of Calgary.

Carole mused that their life has “pretty much been 100% involved in art. It’s been a good way to live our lives; we’ve been able to direct our time and energy in creative ways. In the end, that’s important.”



Night Sky

The basis of art was seen to be hurtful and stale; there had to be a break with the past and a new beginning. Owen has taken great pride in her shared vision with abstract painters of her generation including Ken Noland, Helen Frankenthaler, and Stanley Boxer (all of whom she visited in New York) because together they represented a courageous artistic vision for the future.

No examination of Owen's artistic contributions is complete without a description of the personal upheavals, which she experienced at a young and vulnerable age. As a child, she was a victim of a war that claimed more than a million Yugoslav citizens; as a young adult, she endured the oppression of Marshall Tito's Communist regime. In her words, "I was brought up wealthy. After the war, wealth was confiscated. I felt that I was constantly being watched by detectives. I had to leave my country because of the bitter feelings I had. When I tried to leave, I was imprisoned and treated as a spy. My time in prison gave me time to think; who are these people? My solitude was the impetus to create joy. I worked on myself. What you have in your head, nobody can confiscate."

Owen explained that her incarceration was the beginning of her exploration of the inner world where she had complete freedom. This venture into the psyche lay the groundwork for paintings which would span well over three decades, from the 1970s until now. In works such as *New Vision Series No. 1* (1988) and *New Vision Series No. 8* (1998) the artist



New Vision Series No. 4, 40" x 79" acrylic

The Invisible World

(continued from cover)

comments, "I interpret and convey my inner world through my art, by following my senses and subconscious memory." Similarly, she writes, "Painting is the essence of things I have seen, experienced, and learned. I interpret and convey my inner world through my art, by following my senses and subconscious memory." Inner exploration and expression also amounted to a quiet subversion of oppressive political forces and social constraint.

The inner world is also described by Owen as an invisible world in a special sense. At the University of Zagreb, Croatia (formerly Yugoslavia), she studied microbiology and then later worked in that field. The "invisible" world of the microscope fascinated her because, "it made the invisible world move, more visible." The unseen world becomes the vehicle or channel through which to heighten sensitivity and perception of the visible world. Abstract painting reflects this view; "Abstraction was a world of the invisible."

The Pictograph Series of paintings exhibited at the Agnes Bugera Gallery in 2006 may be seen as a departure from previous works, which have been described as post painterly abstraction or colour field. They clearly borrow from diverse sources of ancient art and reference parts of human anatomy, vegetative forms, and microbiology. Viewed as an expression of inner life, however, on physical and psychic levels, they are entirely consistent with previous explorations. The paintings are understated and quietly elegant; in retrospect, they are a significant addition to Owen's many decades of artistic achievement.

(story continues at the top of page 5)



Emma Lake Revisited, 41" x 43" acrylic/canvas, 2008

Having lived history, Owen also sees history as a critical component of the ASA. She views the ASA as a way of rejoicing in the art of society for the people. We, as artists in this organization, must celebrate life while keeping a close eye on its history and historic intentions. She calls on artists to question, "What are we leaving for future generations? We have to give our best." The artist is called to a vocation. Each of us has to try our best to take the negative in our lives and turn it into something positive. Moreover, we have a duty, she advises, to nurture and build the culture. We have an obligation to enhance and foster cultural expression for the future while preserving the efforts of others from the past who have contributed to the arts.

As past Calgary Branch chair (year 2000) and someone who has experienced extreme repression on a personal level, she challenges present ASA members to cherish the historic contributions of the ASA (founded by A.C. Leighton in 1931) while contemplating the future. With great passion, Owen calls out to present members, what are we doing to identify the contributions of Alberta artists while laying the groundwork for future achievements, individual and collective?

The Invisible World



Emma Lake Revisited, 35" x 35" acrylic/canvas, 2008

Pilgrimage — Irish Landscapes on the Atlantic

Liz Sullivan's Solo Exhibition

Last March, Arts on Atlantic Gallery in Inglewood, Calgary presented Liz Sullivan's solo exhibition *Pilgrimage— Irish Landscapes on the Atlantic*. At the

opening reception, Calgary dancers from the Irwin School of Irish Dancing *kicked up their heels* in bright and colourful attires. The performance was a fitting launch for

the March celebration of St Patrick's Day and for Sullivan's Irish landscape show.

The works came out of a 2008 trip to the Cill Rialaig Artist Retreat in Ireland. It was a pilgrimage to discover a unique sacred site on this isolated island in the Atlantic. The landscape paintings depict Sullivan's journey to the 7th century monastic complex on Skellig Michael, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1996.

George Bernard Shaw described the Skellig islands as "pinnacled and spired Gothic extravagances." After her art residency and some additional research on Celtic and early Christian art and icons, Sullivan completed the pilgrimage series in her Calgary studio. The feature triptych, a luminous Gothic altarpiece, portrays the majesty and sacredness of this unique location.

(See triptych in photo behind the dancers)



80th Anniversary Issue

Danielle LaBrie, Editor



Artist: Gordon Ramsey
*Danielle Smokes Cigar in Screen Porch
Grasmere, Bilby.*
woodcut print

In my years of association with the ASA in various capacities, I've come across a few people who have ask me, "What is the ASA? What does it do?" These questions are difficult to answer without first bringing up *what it was*. It sometimes seems that the early years of the ASA gets more attention than the ASA of today, making you wonder what the focus of the Society truly is.

As an old institution, we need to find a balance between history and the now. We are lucky in that our history gave us a distinctive identity and also a gauge by which we can measure *what we should be*. It is for us to build on what has come before us, using everything that works in the ASA as a strong scaffold for future events. Now that the ASA celebrates a milestone anniversary, turning *eighty* in March, it is an

opportunity for members to reflect on this past as well as our future. Therefore, the next issue of *Highlights* will be dedicated to this celebration.

There will be a feature story on the upcoming exhibition produced by the ASA to commemorate the 80th anniversary. Members will have an opportunity to share their thoughts on the Society: where it has been, where it is today and what it could be in the future. In addition, one section of the issue will be dedicated to portraiture—*those of ASA members produced by other ASA members*.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the members who sent me wonderful comments on *Highlights* and its content. These issues could not have been possible without some great submissions on interesting ASA activities. It has indeed been a pleasure for me to volunteer my time in developing *Highlights*.

Convergence: How to Extend Your Art

by Diane Langlois

Imagine your IPHONE as a metaphor for your art. Just as an IPHONE has many applications, it really is just the convergence of video, music, text messaging, communication functions and purchasing power, all rolled into one hand-held bundle. If you're trying to tap into different art markets, convergence can be a lucrative solution.

Let's start off with the basic sketch, raw, immediate, intuitive and uncontrived. That sketch can be framed and sold as a small painting at a reasonable and affordable price. Take that image and paint it onto a larger canvas and it becomes primed for a gallery exhibition. Take a high-end 40 megabyte digital image of that same painting and transfer it onto material. Try an outdoor weather resistant material such as *Sunbrella* and now you have a piece of art that is the exact digital replica of the painting but can be put out into a garden. Take that same material and make matching pillows, and curtains

and you have an out door patio set and have penetrated the design home decor market.

Take that same image and transfer it onto a silk polyester fabric and make fashion accessories, evening gowns, cocktail dresses, skirts, scarf's and even ties and you've penetrated the fashion market. Put that all together and you have an *installation* piece. Take that same installation piece to a street venue like *Sun and Salsa* or the plaza in Santa Fe and now you have *performance art*. Take a video of that performance art, edit the piece and put it onto YouTube, your website or burn it onto CD's to be used in lieu of a curriculum vitae.

I'm not sure if the best part is the challenge of morphing one image to converge into seven different venues or the look on people's faces when they ask: "You match your painting? How do you do that?" I like to say it is very *Warholian* or *Cirque de Soleil*.



Avenue Hostas

It's magic. But is it art?

Diane's many past careers have converged from fashion modeling, television anchoring, teaching broadcast journalism and a professor of information technology. Her work can be viewed at Willow Studios in Calgary, Regina and Saskatoon. The video *Art de Vivre* can be viewed on YouTube or her web site at www.dianelanglois.com

TOWARDS 2011

Edmonton Branch



The Edmonton Branch unveiled its proposed programming for 2011 during an evening of festivities with ASA members and their invited guests. Edie McIntyre's roast turkey dinner *with all the fixins* was undeniably a huge success.

Three Edmonton Branch members—Annette Ayre, George Botchett and E. Ross Bradley—were honoured for their years of volunteer service for the ASA. They each received hand blown glass awards.

L to R: E. Ross Bradley, Annette Ayre and George Botchett

Res Artis Conference

by Doris Charest

I recently attended a Res Artis conference in Montreal and I thought that I would share what opportunities exist for an artist or writer to be part of a global Artist-in-residence program. These programs offers a location for artists to work for two weeks to six months and many offer grants to help artists complete their project. Artists and administrators from England, Germany, France, Brazil, the United States, Finland, Iceland, Portugal and Australia came to exchange ideas and learn about new developments in the art world.

Every morning we attended two sessions and then in the afternoon, we selected sessions that applied to our personal interests or needs. For example, one morning we had visual artist Sylvie



Cotton give us a presentation about her approach to creating artwork. The next morning we had writer Nicole Brossard read some of her text and discuss her approach to a residency. Residency organizations, that artists could apply to, gave talks about their projects.

The variety was interesting. One New York group held an artist-in-residence in a Bronx community laundromat. This was a location where most of the community met and, therefore, ideal for the artist to interact with the community. Another group matched artists with scientists, musicians, philosophers or

other academics to work on joint projects exploring interdisciplinary themes.

A common thread in the presentations was that artists were encouraged to interact at a local level. One residency host in France worked in an impoverished part of a city. Community involvement with the artist meant that they taught art to the residents or involved the community in building a portion of the project.

A second group worked to find a location for an artist who wanted to work with Alzheimer patients. Environmental, political, or human-interest issues were dominant themes. Artists were expected to have developed concepts, leaving the residency organizations the work of finding appropriate locations to develop these concepts. The next Res Artis conference is in Tokyo in 2012.

Come celebrate with us!

The Alberta Society of Artists is celebrating their 80th Anniversary with a Grand Gala and Banquet at the Edmonton Country Club on April 30, 2011. The ASA's AGM will be held earlier on the same day.

We will keep you informed as plans for this important event continue to evolve. If you have any questions or suggestions please contact Monika Salkauskas at monika@artists-society.ab.ca or (1) 403 265 0012.

NEWLY MINTED FINE ARTS GROUP IN ALBERTA

Most artists in Alberta haven't heard of the new *encaustic* group of women whimsically called *Wimmin in Wax*. We're not actually made of wax but we all work with wax, using the encaustic



technique. It's amazing how different and unique all our artworks are considering that we all use the same tools: various types of wax, pigment, cradled panels

and hot implements.

Encaustic artwork has been in existence for over 2000 years—witness the Fayum funeral portraits of the Egyptian Pharaohs in museums in Cairo. They were painted in wax in the likeness of each particular royal personage to memorialize their preserved mummies, remaining clear and perfect to this present date!

Our group consists of eleven Alberta artists, most from the Edmonton area but also from Radway, Spruce Grove and Hinton. Wimmin in Wax members are Lorna Kemp (the ringleader—she's on the International Encaustic Organization board and a full ASA member), Izabella Orzelski-Konikowski, Lucy Saunders, Sirkka Kadatz, Glenda Lewisch, Catherine Boggs, Diane Plasse, Cathryn Seifrit, Kim

Blair, Jan Montgomery and, yours truly, Monika Dery (*images supplied by Monika*).



Our Alberta tour has taken off with an exhibition which ran from September 30 to October 31 at the Naess Gallery located in the Paint Spot, Old Strathcona. At least six future venues have been confirmed across the province. Included in these exhibitions will be the city of Edmonton, Spruce Grove, Calgary, Hinton and many points in between. Look for a schedule of events as each show will have a reception with refreshments, and most of the artists in attendance. For more info contact Lorna Kemp at lornakemp45@gmail.com.

In The Clear Light of Day

Gena LaCoste, ASA is exhibiting new works at the Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre (401-First St. SE), Medicine Hat, AB. *In the Clear Light of Day* features watercolours produced from Gena's experience in the beautiful southeastern corner of this province.

Show opens Dec. 24th and hangs until February 13th. For more information call the Esplanade at 403 502 8583 or visit the artist's website www.genalacoste.com.

Gena LaCosta, *Meandering Home*, WC



Edmonton Branch Equipment

Members of the Edmonton Branch can access the following equipment:

Canon D50 with tripod & lights

Laptop with Adobe CS3 suite that includes Photoshop, InDesign and Illustrator.

LCD projector

Contact the Edmonton Branch Equipment Manager, Gordon Ramsey, at gramsey551@shaw.ca / 780 249 4062 for more info.

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