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Painting from the Inside Out : interview with Teresa Young

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Painting from the Inside Out Interview with Teresa Young⁵⁹

Monika Władzik (questions & realizations) and Przemysław Staroń (questions)

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Teresa Young: *Dreams of Lothlorien*

⁵⁹ <http://www.teresa-young.net>

Looking at your paintings, one may think that your compositions are based on glances and how their lines meet. What are the characters from your paintings looking at? Do they look outwards or inwards? At the world of the painting or the viewer?

Actually, I think that's an interesting concept! Very often, the eyes within my painting are looking outwards, but usually only when they are by themselves. The characters are often looking inwards contemplatively, unless it's obvious that they are meeting the eyes of the viewer. When I did portraits in my youth, my patrons often mentioned that the portraits I created had eyes that appeared to follow the viewer as they changed position; and I think that's still true of some of the characters in my paintings.

But really, sometimes when I paint, creativity itself just causes the designs to flow in different directions, I tend to paint until I feel that the artwork is 'balanced' or 'right'. Usually, I can see several valid interpretations after the work is complete. So it's an interesting doorway into my own psyche, and it's enlightening for me as a way of knowing my own mind. An artist acquaintance of mine offered his opinion that in a way, I'm still doing portraits in a way, but these are now focused on my internal makeup rather than the external.

The divine symbol of the disembodied eye that sees and knows everything inspires both fascination and horror. Do the eyes from your pictures exist as separate organs that link the material dimension to the immaterial one? Are they in a way similar to the Cartesian pineal gland that was supposed to connect the mind with the body?

Yes, the floating eyes in my paintings are definitely symbolic. And you are bang on when you think they link us to an immaterial world. These eyes form a window into 'something' else. By joining the fantasy art realm and the viewer, the eyes serve as an emotional bridge for us to connect to what's going on in this other realm.

Some of your more recent works resemble the pictures you can see in a kaleidoscope or under a microscope. What inspires those colourful hallucinatory forms and organic compounds? Would that be microbiology or rather stained-glass art?

Actually, it might be a bit of both. I love stained glass, and early on, it was pointed out to me that my acrylic paintings often have that feeling to them. So, of course, I had to try stained glass in real life (one of my day jobs was in the military as an electronics technician, I was already great with a soldering iron). Later on, since I found stained glass too restrictive artistically (The lines weren't fine enough for me, and they all had to connect!), I moved on to faux stained glass painting. This was interesting, as the colours were vivid and dynamic.

Regarding the organic tendencies in my paintings? That was probably due to the fact that my early focus on a career was in biology. (Every artist needs a day job, so I thought biology was a good choice!) So I started out as a scientist of sorts, which is

probably why I ended up getting a degree in electrical engineering as an older adult. My orientation to details and love of mathematics influences my ideals of beauty and expresses itself in my art style.

Could you tell us what are your major inspirations? What topics tend to reappear in your art?

Patterns, manual fractals⁶⁰ and dancing colour harmonies are integral components to most of my paintings. But what are my major inspirations for painting? I guess nature is one, as I've always been fascinated by the play of colours and shadows in the world around me.

I like to think that sometimes I paint with light, so that's a source of inspiration as well. A topic that does reappear consistently in my work is personal growth and pushing your own boundaries. I really believe that art is self-exploration for the artist.

Would you say that your works have more surrealistic or expressionistic overtones?

Expressionistic, oddly enough, because it is all really an expression of my inner environment. I've always thought that artists truly only have their own voice to speak with, and if we're lucky, it resonates with others.

Could you name three artists that have had a decisive influence on your painting style?

Actually, it's pretty easy - Salvador Dali, Emily Carr, native aboriginal art of the Haida tribe on the west coast of Canada. The last isn't a particular artist, but you can see a native Indian influence on my artwork, and I really can't discount it. It's so noticeable that I researched my family tree and found out that I have roots in that culture. My grandfather was Cree and British (Métis).

One of your paintings printed by Avant was inspired by Tolkien's realm of elves. Is literature important to you as an artist?

Yes, I'm quite an avid reader, and sorry to say, I've read most of Tolkien's works many times. I'm a veteran fantasy fan, as this is my favourite type of fiction.

The drawing that you refer to actually became one of my favourite pieces I've created this year, so last weekend I finally finished an acrylic painting based on the drawing. The painting is slightly different than the original drawing, as I don't ever copy using

⁶⁰ According to the definition provided by Kerry Mitchell in *The Fractal Art Manifesto*, "Fractal Art is a genre concerned with fractals—shapes or sets characterized by self affinity (small portions of the image resemble the overall shape) and an infinite amount of detail, at all scales. Fractals are typically created on a digital computer, using an iterative numerical process." More at www.fractalus.com DOA 23 Nov 2012.

grids or any other artificial means. I just looked at it and redrew it onto the canvas freehand, and it's a different medium, so it has a different feel to it. I like it though, it has added a more spread-out balance to the piece, and the contrast using deep darks and bright highlights with complementary colour harmonies offers a different experience for the viewer.

In one of the entries on your blog, you said that you are fascinated by computer graphics. How do you see painting in the era of digitization?

I see digital graphics as a brave new world, and the latest art expression frontier. It gives rise to quite a spectrum of creativity and like the evolution of technology and the Internet itself, it's constantly changing. Ironically, it's not one that I've delved into very deeply on my own, yet.

More often than not you use organic or pseudo-organic forms in your paintings. Would it be justified to say that your art is ecological, in the sense that it expresses a longing for a life close to nature?

I'd sort of agree with you there, but I don't think it's expressing a longing for a life close to nature. More accurately, it's an expression of my connection to the world and my feelings about life in general. I find a lot of beauty in organic forms, since my early bent in art was towards realism. (Heavily towards realism! I never did an abstract piece until my late teens, it's almost like I was rigid and couldn't get my brain around it.)

In realistic art, you're interpreting nature to create. Personally, I see no reason why abstraction needs to be formless and undefined. It's a world of its own in every artwork, and like a good fantasy writer, I'm *world building*, so I give it depth and definition on its own terms.

Let's go back to nature, this time in a more literal sense. Are you in any way inspired by the landscapes of Nova Scotia?

Of course, but in a more emotional rather than representational way; over time, I've really moved away from copying what I see in the outer world.

One thing I've always thought about as an artist is that we see differently than most people. Sometimes I can turn my mind towards a different kind of sight, viewing the world around me as a painting. In Nova Scotia, when I look at the landscape I can sometimes see brushstrokes there. Especially in the sky and distant hills, it's that vivid.

More about Teresa Young: <http://www.teresa-young.net/information/>