

Rowena Perkins: Appreciating the Interconnectedness of All Life Cape Cod, Mass., Artist

SINCE I began my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1989, many changes have happened in my life and art. I had the experience of running a gallery in 1992–93 when I opened my studio to the public. This was a big challenge and a wonderful opportunity. My work is now included in many private collections, and I'm currently showing in two galleries on Cape Cod. I have been teaching painting and drawing classes in my community over the last few months, and I really feel the bodhisattva energy flowing outward.

I have been drawing and painting for many years; the creative spirit has always been a large part of my life. When I started to practice Buddhism, my creativity became much more positive and energetic. Now more than ever, I feel I understand President Ikeda's dream for world kosen-rufu.

Since I live in a rather isolated place—Wellfleet, Mass., on Cape Cod—I really appreciate the interconnectedness of all life, and the oneness of life and its environment. It is here that I have learned it is not where I am, but how I live my life as a human being that counts. The nearest large city is Boston, two hours away. Before, what I considered an obstacle—for instance, the distances between myself and others, like my father, who has lived thousands of miles from me for most of my life—I view now as an opportunity for improving my relationships. With this attitude, I try each day to make enlightened discoveries in my work as an artist and to effect a positive change in society.

Each year since the beginning of my practice, I have made goals and determined not to give in to discouragement or doubt. I am totally committed to my mission as an artist for kosen-rufu, and determined to show actual proof to my family and friends of the greatness of the Gohonzon. It has been revealed to me over time how other people feel joy when viewing my paintings.

I have accomplished three ceramic tile commissions for homes, in which I designed and created the tiles. I installed one project myself, which was very challenging physically since there were a couple hundred tiles four inches square.

Recently I have been painting functional objects such as furniture. My first piece was a huge bureau that I painted and stenciled extensively. It will be included in an exhibit and auction titled "Furnishing the Future," which will take place in Boston, and will partially benefit the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. The coalition has a furniture program that aids the transition of homeless individuals, and I'm glad to contribute to their positive growth.

Each year ten artists are chosen to be included in the activities surrounding the local "Pops" concert. "Artists for Pops" activities benefit the high school scholarship program, providing a total of \$10,000 to a graduating senior, \$2,500 on completion of each academic year. For my part, I will be painting outdoors in one of the most beautiful properties on the lower Cape. Then, the painting will be exhibited and auctioned off, with a fifty percent share for each of us. I'm pleased that I was chosen to be a part of something in the community that will benefit the education of youth.

A new direction in my art has been making porcelain jewelry. There is something special about wearable art; it's close to the heart. The work was included in an annual fashion show several years ago on the upper Cape and is being shown regularly at the Wellfleet Artisans Cooperative and elsewhere.

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For many years, I have been focusing on still life as subject matter. I have also been painting landscapes, with an occasional figure painting. Through my intense exploration of still life, I have discovered true content in my work. It is because of the discipline of painting that I can carry over into other media smoothly.

FLOWERS, fruit and unique objects have my focus for many years; there's a whole world in them depending on what one does with them. Oil continues to be my greatest love, with watercolor playing its way into my repertoire over the last few years. My oil monotypes are the latest effort reach out to humanity. They fuse the technique of oil painting, with the spontaneity of printmaking; hence the name "the painterly print" evolved. Oil monotypes are both studied and intuitive, with the paper showing through in places, like the sun. The viewer completes the equation; it is an ongoing drama.

My paintings are a reflection of what I feel and see. They are about the inherent possibilities of life. The personal language of painting contains private understandings. Through the observation of nature, the mysteries of life's rhythms are revealed. Painting seeks to analyze and define what it means to be human. My ability has convinced me to continue steadfastly in the pursuit of my own development. My influences are varied, but they center on the greatest modern masters who devoted themselves passionately to their art—Picasso, Matisse, Bonnard, Braque, Cézanne, Gauguin, Klimt, Munch and Schiele, to name a few.

But the greatest influences in my life have been: SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, who has taught me how to practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism with the correct attitude and a vigorous spirit; my grandmother, who taught me about life and diligence; my mother, from whom I inherited the ability to produce art; and my father, whose quiet, scholarly ways have been a source of inspiration. I really have a lot of appreciation for exactly who I am now.

Due to my Buddhist practice, I have come to realize the mystical bonds that exist between family members. The SGI has been like a family to me, showing me respect, and teaching me to respect others. I am truly indebted to my family and the SGI for the encouragement I have received, and the courage to continue under any circumstances. □