

Artists Who Inspire

by Renée Phillips, The Artrepreneur Coach

This article is a sequel to *Dare to Step Outside the Box*, which appeared in the June 2009 issue of *Art Calendar*. I've been interested in artists who take risks and challenge themselves ever since I read *Chronicles of Courage: Very Special Artists* by Jean Kennedy Smith and George Plimpton in 1993. This inspiring book profiled artists who possess extraordinary fortitude despite hardships.

In this article, you'll meet artists who have had the vision and courage to take the leap into an art career, pursue an innovative or unpopular path, or contribute to positive change. These artists serve as role models for each of us, encouraging us to aspire to our highest potential.

Turning Tragedy Into Triumph

Helen Keller said, "When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us." Well, not true of these artists. They use the power of experience to contribute to greater causes beyond their own suffering.

When Rick Colson's wife was diagnosed with stage four cancer, he spent a year as her primary caregiver, leaving the business world and taking time to reflect. This artist from Wayland, Massachusetts, decided it was time to pursue his real passions — photography and image processing — but with a new spin: "Since my wife's cancer is environmentally-related, I decided to start the world's first virtually 100 percent green custom photo lab." Colson prints healthier, sustainable, museum-quality fine art and photographic reproductions for his clients and his own work, without VOCs, chlorine, acids and chemicals. "We use state-of-the-art, aqueous carbon pigment printing on sustainable, recycled and fully recyclable papers and other substrates, including those derived from cotton and bamboo."

Rick says his wife is now doing well, and he enjoys the satisfaction of forging a positive new trail in the photographic



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Missing You by Elizabeth Stewart Carrigan. Oil on canvas, 30" x 24".

industry. For more information on Rick's efforts, visit www.ecovisual.com or www.greenphotoprint.com, or join his Green Imaging network on LinkedIn.

Elizabeth Stewart Carrigan (www.elizabethstewartart.com) an artist from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, started painting in earnest in 2003, when she became ill with Lyme disease: "I had been studying Celtic design on my own, but with many hours a day in bed for several months during treatment, I launched into painting, creating intricate scenes, all interpreted using Celtic design as a visual language. This was very healing, and after I completed several successful paintings, I entered a few competitions and won some awards. I now

specialize in painting pet portraits in my signature Celtic design style."

Elizabeth also donates pet portrait commissions to local charity auctions: "Donating artwork makes me feel richer, and I like being thought of as a generous contributor."

Following a Mission

While funding for art programs is being slashed, Jami Taback (www.jamitaback.com), a master printmaker, painter and art historian from New York, has come to the rescue. With a strong desire to help children, she established "Adventures in Printmaking with Jami Taback," a model for teaching art based on an intensive mentoring relationship with inner city youth, particularly those with behavioral problems and special education needs. During the last four years, she has taught and interacted with more than 300 children in alternative, public and private schools.

Jami says, "Through learning about the art of printmaking and its history rooted in ancient civilization as a tool for communication, students immerse themselves in the arts and education."

She sets up a printmaking studio with a portable table press at the schools, and the youth spend several hours each week learning and producing their own work. The work is then incorporated into a museum-quality mural at their school. Field trips to museums further enhance the art experience: "Sometimes, it's just to engage the kids in something creative, think about things differently, or to meet an artist, but sometimes it sparks an interest, and they find out that they are an artist, too."

Karen Loew (www.KLoew.com) is a New York City artist and proud member of the Artists of the Coast Guard Art Program (COGAP) (www.USCG.mil/art). She is also the COGAP Committee Chair of the Salmagundi Club, which sponsors the national program. Member artists give their time and talent in support of this armed service. Karen explains, "We immortalize in our paintings the brave men and women who serve our country in the United States Coast Guard."

Since 1999, Karen has contributed 17 works of art, nine of which were created after her deployment to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in May 2002. "The USCG sent me there to document port security by PSU 305 out of Ft. Eustis, Virginia. This Port Security Unit, comprised primarily of reservists called into extended service, was the same one that came to New York Harbor right after the 9/11 attacks on our city. It was

very important to me, since I was selected to tell their story, that I give them proper tribute as a personal thank you. The brave and selfless work of the USCG is the greatest inspiration for creating my art for COGAP."

Speaking the Truth

I admire an artist who has chosen the path of most resistance. Such an artist responds to a higher purpose, despite the knowledge that their collectors and galleries will be limited.

Doug Auld (www.dougauld.com) paints portraits of burn survivors. His *State of Grace* series was initially inspired by what he describes as a momentary encounter with an adolescent burn survivor some 30 years ago. "In 2004, I began painting large-scale portraits of young burn survivors, done with the cooperation of Kathe Conlon and Roy Bond at the Burn Center at the St Barnabas Medical Center in New Jersey." Doug refers to his art as "exploring beauty's boundaries," saying "(My models) are remarkable people who have overcome extreme adversity and display traits such as courage, inner strength, compassion and kindness."

Doug's art invites viewers to confront what makes us human and how these traits can alter people's perception of who they find to be beautiful. He says, "I believe that art and the power of the image can be a catalyst for our personal evolution and the shaping of our society. In order to grow, we first have to confront the truth. This is the purpose of my work."

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