

artist profile

J e a n n e B o n i n e



PHOTO BY DENNIS LIDDELL

Artist's World Is Her Canvas

Jeanne Bonine's work is inspired by life's many multifaceted experiences—from the beauty of a desert scene or a beautiful flower to the 'darkness' and 'light' experienced by fellow cancer patients and survivors. Her gratitude for being gifted, for nature and for living are constant and inspiring.

BY JENNIFER ZEMANEK

ABN Intern

*We come to this world neither alone nor naked,
For each soul begins its life draped in the tapestry of time.
It is a weaving of infinite wisdom stretching throughout the universe,
Connecting all that ever was with all that will ever be.
It is the fabric of life...the answers to all you seek...
To all you pretend not to know.
Hidden in the shadows of its folds is the sum of all your experiences,
And its ever-changing pattern is a result of all your thoughts.
Wear then, in faith, the knowledge of which it brings.
Understand that it will be disguised in simple miracles
And moments of inspiration...in the beauty of a lily
or in a familiar scent of the unknown. —Jeanne Bonine (2001)*

Jeanne Bonine has led a life that has encouraged these inspirational words—the prose that accompanies her paintings.

Bonine was born to a father, fondly known as “KJ” and mother Mickey, in St. Paul, MN. It was her father who taught her the ways of ancient wisdom through solitude, silence and serenity. Her mother showed her the beauty of flowers, planting the seeds under the summer sun. Her father’s philosophies and times shared with her mother can be seen in her paintings—and later her sons, brother and life experiences came through with each brush stroke.

At the age of 20, Bonine, searching for meaning, turned to her passion for art and took her first and only out-of-school art class. Here, she was intro-

duced to oils. It was also during this time that Bonine married and then had her first-born, Steven.

As she was enjoying marriage, parenting and painting, she joined the local arts society and contributed pieces to the annual “Art Onmibus” show. Her flower paintings often earned her “Public Opinion Best of Show.”

“Age will mature inspiration,” says Bonine, “yet, as all wannabe artists know, there is nothing more inspiring than your first sale to someone outside your



▲ “A Ruby Rumba”

circle of friends. It was at this show that I came to bloom. I entered a landscape painting created for my aunt, forgetting to mark it 'Not for Sale.' At the end of the show, my painting had been replaced with an envelope containing a check 'to the budding artist.'"

The death of her father overshadowed the news of her pregnancy with her second child, but son, Chad, was born healthy. However, the impact of her father's death also impacted her marriage, eventually leading to divorce. Bonine says, "the color gray had just been added to my palette."

Devoting her life to providing for her children, it was during her second marriage that Bonine was encouraged to devote more time to being an artist. "Outdoor art festivals began, and so did my career," Bonine says. "Although being self-taught means there are no shortcuts to creating a masterpiece, it can give you the opportunity to develop your own distinct style of painting. I strived for this distinction while working on subjects that ranged from nudes to jungle animals and still lifes to landscapes."

"Marriage seemed to be my only challenge in life," says Bonine, "and almost a decade passed before I was left with the task of single parenting again."

Life and Watercolors

Within nine months and three changes of address (Bonine now lives in Scottsdale, AZ), she changed her medium of painting from oils to watercolor. "Painting in watercolor is like dealing with life," says Bonine. "You try to control the uncontrollable and in the process you learn when to let go and when to quit. Sometimes it takes you where you had not intended, but if you trust the flow, it will bring you to a destined finish."

Her first watercolors were simple, using exotic birds and flowers as her subjects. Then inspiration struck.

"I remember it well," says Bonine. "The inspiration was a pair of swans I had seen while visiting the Cincinnati Zoo at my first out-of-state art fair. The divine happened during my mother's phone call. A vision appeared embossed over the blues and grays of this dream like the piece I was finishing. 'Mom,' I said, 'I am going to publish this painting and change the direction of my life.'"

"Titles, for the first time, became a part of my self-expression and appropriately this one was named, 'Once Upon a Dream.'"

In the next two years, 550 pieces were purchased, as the edition was labeled "Sold Out."

Her next seven images were printed by a Minnesota publisher, but just as she became a self-taught artist, she became a self-taught publisher.

"I soon became a savvy print artist, as I learned everything from how to push color on the presses to the nuances of the marketplace. Feeling com-

fortable in the print industry, it became time, once again, for me to control my own destiny. I regained the ownership of self-publishing."

Crisis Reveals Inner Beauty

After travelling to New Zealand and following the art circuit throughout the United States, Bonine was diagnosed with breast cancer. Upon being told, Bonine says, "Color left my face as the canvas of my life erased all signs of permanency."

Bonine was referred to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, for consulta-



▲ "Edge of Desire"

tion and treatment. Treatment and recovery began as Bonine's brother, Bill, worked her shows. Bonine says she also began to paint, not for her career, but for herself. Words became as important as paint, as Bonine began writing prose to accompany her paintings.

"'Moonlight Surrender' was inspired and painted from the depths of my soul. It was a self-portrait of a lone swan swimming in darkness. Aware of her frailties, clear of her intentions and unencumbered by fear, she pursued her way toward the light."

The painting was published by several Twin City Deck the Walls stores with a portion of the proceeds being donated to the American Cancer Society.

The painting was dedicated, "To all who encounter the face of darkness that they may courageously surrender their fears and discover the light of hope and joy."

Back home in Arizona, radiation treatments began at Mayo Clinic Scottsdale. Arizona provided inspiration—"the Sonoran Desert would become a way of life."

*I wondered in confusion,
Dreaming and searching for reason and hope.
At last I came upon a desert dream
And my life began again.
In sandy submission I grasped onto this strange and
Wondrous land
And watched with guided inspiration
As a cactus flower, left orphaned with disappointment
And the pains of drought,
Summoned her courage
To blossom in a profusion of light.
Surely if she could survive,
So could I!
Surrendering to this vision of strength,
I found reason in acceptance,
Life in courage,
And hope in the beauty that they bring. —Jeanne Bonine (2004)*

Art for Healing

"Artists are blessed with imagination, and now I would use this gift in my healing," says Bonine. "In my mind's eye, radiation was changed into heavenly rays of light that penetrated with perfect precision, melting away disease and returning itself back into the universe as an offering of gratitude."

To inspire other patients, "Moonlight Surrender" was hung on the Mayo Clinic Scottsdale's wall, also celebrating Bonine's survival.



▲ "Light of Grace"

Continued on page 56



▲ "Velvet Dreams and Scarlet Memories"



▲ "Wine and Roses"

Continued from page 55

Bonine now reintroduced herself back into the business of art. Her work was featured as a part of a three-woman show at the West Valley Art Museum, where the curator labeled her a "Romantic Realist."

"How could he know so much about me from my paintings?" says Bonine. "Did he know it was incurable? Throughout my single life I had experienced my share of romantic interludes. Now there was no need, for the love of my life and the love of my work had won my dedication. The truer I became to this relationship, the more my art experienced flow, and the more my art experienced flow, the more visible the message of my art became."

"From this union my purpose was born. Collectors and admirers of my work began to tell me that my paintings brought them peace and raised their awareness of beauty to a new level, and those who were suffering claimed it

took their pain away. Everything happens for a reason—it is part of the tapestry we weave."

The next eight years were spent working along side her brother, Bill. He worked the business and galleries as Bonine painted more and more. Their work together ended when Bill passed away from cancer.

"I no longer felt connected to my brother," says Bonine. "I was unable to paint until I finally addressed my anger. Without giving it any thought, I painted the flowers of my brother's desire. 'Why don't you ever paint pansies?' he would say. 'Everybody loves pansies.'"

"The Birth of Eve,' 'The Garden of Life' and 'Edge of Desire' would have been Bill's favorites. Then I realized he was connecting with me all along."

"How did I become the 'Romantic Realist,' the watercolorist whose passion it is to bring beauty and light to the world? Perhaps it began on the lakes of Minnesota, where I was drawn to the silence and serenity of the moment. There, surrounded by nature's intent, I began to feel the fabric of life. Spoken in whispers of the wind were the answers to all I would seek. By opening my heart to the beauty that would surround my life,

I would see what God had intended, for nature is the greatest teacher of all."

"Unencumbered by its own beauty, is it not the rose who, in sweet surrender, gives of itself and worries not of tomorrow? In a desert where no flower should dare to bloom, is it not life, in quest of life, that gives way to the greatest miracle of all, thus fulfilling the promise of the spirit. Alone in the silent serenity of my mind, I find myself in a studio of oneness; and there I continue to create with gratitude and love." **ABN**

For reprints of this article, call 800-867-9285, ext. 5503.

SOURCE

■ Jeanne Bonine Studio, 480-585-1985, www.jeannebonine.com