

A Feminine Perspective

ARTIST: Marilee Beard Campbell (1938-) Provo, Utah

TITLE: *The Dark Side of the Garden* 1993

MEDIA: Pastel Painting

SIZE: 15-3/4" x 23-1/2"

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Marilee Beard Campbell was born June 28, 1938, in Provo, Utah. She loves most to capture the light and color of nature here in Utah, although her "mobile studio" allows her access to landscapes across the country. About her feelings for the Utah land, she has said,

This desert can have a blazing starkness--harsh and glaring--but when evening comes, the magic begins. The colors soften and take on mysterious qualities. The brassy red soil becomes bluish or red violet in the distance and the grayed blues and limy greens of the brush are a subdued riot against the soil. The blue of the sky has a clarity that is found in few other places, even as it slowly slips away into aqua and lavender tones or radiating reds and oranges. Under the shelter of large pines, the dark limbs are filled with quiet, almost imperceptible color transitions...light glows softly from the shadows.

I see musical rhythm and movement as well as drama and theater in landscape. When sunlight breaks through the clouds it becomes a warm, wonderful spotlight moving silently across a stage. It's a formidable task to try to capture the essence of a scene while light is moving and changing the composition every few minutes. One is forced to distill it into a cohesive, simplified design very quickly.

Marilee Campbell is the granddaughter of George Beard, a noted pioneer painter of the early west, and daughter of a painter-mother and a chainsaw-wood-sculpting father; and is herself, a pioneer of Plein Air (outdoor) pastel painting of the western American landscape. She says about her choice,

Plein Air painting requires a big investment of time in selecting sites, choosing times of day, packing up gear, setting up and being emotionally prepared to seize the moment. It is all a gamble, but when it is successful, it is a high like few other highs. It can be addicting.

When I refine the work at home I try to keep the same spontaneity and mood that I felt outdoors. If I change much of what was painted on the spot the feeling becomes lost in the process. Painters who demand predictability and absolute control cannot work Plein Air. Flexibility is the key to success.

Some of my favorite works are those Plein Air pieces that use few strokes, a kind of calligraphic simplicity that feels Oriental, a visual shorthand. The passion of the moment and the intense concentration required outdoors make it happen. (Once I felt I could feel the earth breathing.) From such conditions come the paintings that I choose to keep in my home, because the experience cannot be repeated in exactly that way again.

It pleases me when viewers notice that my work very often centers around evening scenes or ponds or light on water. I choose to emphasize evening rather than noon time. I am fascinated with the contrast between light and shadow and the feeling of mystery in the shadow areas. It may have something to do with my belief that there must be opposition in all things. On another level, it represents the conflicting ideas and emotions that we all face in life, which at times become a battleground for our conscience, a struggle between good and evil. Light glowing softly from the shadows speaks my belief that good will ultimately triumph on this earth.

The artist, who makes many of her own thousands of colored pastels, states,

I chose pastel in the beginning because it was more compatible with my family responsibilities as wife of a busy educator and mother of five. In 1970, while working in figure at the Birmingham Art Association, I became aware of the current works of the New York artists and found for the first time the availability of soft pastels and French papers that launched me into full color paintings in pastel. Travel throughout Europe and study of museum artists have extended my reference in pastel painting.

My life has been deeply touched by the work of other artists such as Joaquin Sorolla, Käthe Kollwitz, George Inness, and pastelists from the 16th century on. The German painter Johann Thiele is credited with its invention. A Venetian artist, Rosalba Carriera, was the first to make consistent use of pastel. Chardin did portraits with an open stroke, while La Tour preferred the blended finish. Thereafter, a galaxy of famous artists such as Watteau, Copley, Delacroix, Millet, Manet, Renoir, Toulouse-Lautrec, Vuillard, Bonnard, Glackens, Whistler, Hassam, and William Merritt Chase used pastel for finished work rather than preliminary sketches. Edgar Degas was the most prolific user of pastel and its champion. His protege, Mary Cassatt, introduced Impressionists' pastels to her friends in Philadelphia and Washington and thus to the U.S. Today, pastel paintings have the stature of oil and watercolor as a major fine art medium.

Marilee Campbell studied at Brigham Young University, where she got a B. A., at the University of Utah, and at the Birmingham Art Association in Detroit, Michigan. She is the recipient of the Pastel Society of America's "Exceptional Merit"--its major annual award (New York City, 1988). She is one of the guest artists invited by the Plein Air Painters of America (P.A.P.A.) to participate in their prestigious shows at Catalina Island. In addition to illustrations for magazines and book covers such as *The Lord's Harvest* and *The Golden Harvest*, reproduced for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, her work may be seen in private and corporate collections and galleries. Recent credits of note are, Jurors' Choice, April Salon, 1994, Springville Museum of Art; "Utah, Out of the Land" Women's Exhibit, State of Utah; L.D.S. Church International Exhibit 1994; BYU Alumni 100 Exhibition, 1994. Recently, her work was featured in the renowned Knickerbocker Show in Scottsdale, Arizona. The show contained works of 59 artists (out of 2,000 who submitted work). Campbell also has four pieces featured in the book *Best of Pastel*. She is one of 140 artists from a nation-wide selection and one of very few who have four pieces in the book.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

(History, Aesthetics, Criticism)

History (Art in Context) What landscape painters or paintings do you remember? Are any of these pastel paintings? Where did the artists live and paint? How would you describe the paintings as reflective of the artists' lives and times? How is landscape painting an important history of art? (Read this and other artists' biographies to help answer the questions.)

Aesthetics (Questions about Art) Are landscape paintings art? What is the most beautiful landscape painting you have seen? What attracted and kept your attention? What makes it beautiful? What view of the garden do you prefer? (Light or dark) How does each make you feel? Why do you think you feel as you do, or what causes you to enjoy one more than the other? How is a dark-colored landscape beautiful? What does

this artist see as beautiful? (Note if females or males have similar preferences.) If you had the money, would you buy this painting? Is it a good painting for the art museum's collection? What is the purpose and function of landscape painting? Is its major value in its beauty? In what ways do you find value in landscape paintings from Europe, Asia, or the Americas over photographs of the same? (Discuss whether your responses and those of others might be affected by conditions questioned under history.)

Criticism (Evaluating Art and Meaning) What is the artist trying to say with the subject of landscape, as well as with this particular scene? Which of the objects have received the most attention? What symbolic meanings can you find? Does the artist's being a female strengthen or weaken the expression of this landscape scene? How might the scene have been altered if it were a masculine instead of a feminine perspective or interpretation? Do you feel it is a good example of landscape painting? Do you like the artwork? Why, or why not?

ACTIVITIES

1. Visual Arts-creating.

Objective: Students will explore pastels.

Have the students explore the pastel medium by applying the colors to different textured and colored papers. Many artists think medium and dark-colored papers show the pastel color best. They should rub, blend, overlap strokes, or use fine, closely spaced lines, and experiment using the sides of the pastels for solid bodies of color and the ends for sharp details. This exercise can be extended by introducing other pastel media (i.e. oil pastels, hard pastels).

Background information on pastel

Pastel is pure pigment, the same pigment used in all art media. It is the most permanent of all when applied to conservation ground and properly framed. Pastel has no liquid binder that may cause the surface to darken, fade, yellow, crack or blister with time. Pastels from the 16th century exist today, as fresh as the day they were painted. Pastel does not at all refer to pale colors, as the word is commonly used in cosmetic and fashion terminology. The name pastel comes from the French word "pastiche" because the pure, powdered pigment is ground into a paste with a binder and then rolled into sticks. The infinite variety of colors in the pastel palette range from soft and subtle to hard and brilliant. An artwork is created by stroking the sticks of dry pigment across an abrasive ground, embedding the color in the "tooth" of the paper, sandboard, canvas, etc. If the ground is completely covered with pastel, the work is considered a pastel painting; leaving much of the ground exposed produces a pastel sketch. Techniques vary with individual artists. Pastel can be blended or used with visible strokes. The medium is favored by many artists because it allows a spontaneous approach. There is no drying time, and no allowances have to be made for a change in color due to drying. A particle of pastel pigment seen under a microscope looks like a diamond with many facets. Pastel paintings reflect light like a prism. No other medium has the power of color or stability. Pastel does not oxidize with the passage of time. Pastel must never be confused with colored chalk. Chalk is a limestone substance impregnated with dyes. Pastel is sometimes

combined with watercolor, gouache, acrylic, charcoal or pencil in a "mixed-melange" painting, but it is incompatible with oil paint.

2. Visual Arts-perceiving

Objective: Students will demonstrate basic skills in the use of elements and principles by applying three of these structures in a plein-air, pastel landscape painting.

Show the class the image of *The Dark Side of the Garden* and discuss the artwork using QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING and the following questions: What elements do you see? In what ways is the painting's title a clue to the artist's choice of color, light, and line? How does the artist use form, texture, space, etc.? What do you feel is the most meaningful element in the design? Could the painting be expressed in a single color? In two or more? Why? Can you see the light in the painting? Where is the light source? How is line used to lead your eye through the painting? How does the movement of your eye make you feel? Remind the students to ask themselves these same questions as they design their paintings.

Plan to use several class periods for this activity. Take the students outside and let them plan their pastel paintings using their three structural choices. Have the students state their three structural choices before beginning their artwork (i.e. I am going to use lines to create movement, shape to create balance, and color to create emphasis). Read some of Ms. Campbell's comments about plein-air painting to the class, particularly her comment about keeping a feeling of spontaneity. Give the students two or three class periods to finish their paintings. Display the finished pieces and compare the various choices of subject and use of elements and principles (structures).

Simplified Variations and Extensions:

1. For younger classes, show the image of *The Dark Side of the Garden* and talk a little about plein-air painting (painting outside while looking at the scene). If using pastels, give the students a few minutes to experiment with the medium and then go outside and make pastel paintings of scenes visible from the schoolyard or a nearby area.

Spray finished drawings with fixative to avoid smearing. Use the spray out of doors to avoid breathing the fumes.

Very young students may be more frustrated than pleased with pastels--they do smear. You can have them use crayons instead.

3. Science

Objective: The students will demonstrate their understanding of structure by making a drawing of the structure of an object.

Pick an appropriate list of subjects from recent science lessons and have the students make drawings showing the inner structure of an object chosen from the list. The students can use the structure of the object as the whole drawing or can show several views of the same object.

You may want to include a short descriptive essay or paragraph about the object's structure as part of the activity.

4. Mathematics

Objective: The students will demonstrate an awareness of the mathematics inherent in nature by documenting how a specific object demonstrates mathematical relationships.

This lesson can be tied in with a biology unit, if desired. Show the students real and pictured objects that demonstrate mathematical relationships--kinds of symmetry; spirals in shells, growth patterns, and flight patterns; proportional relationships; etc. Have the students choose one idea to document. They should include measurements or indicators of the mathematical relationships involved.

5. Social Studies

Objective: The students will demonstrate an understanding of how landscape art can reflect the geography and times of the painter by contrasting at least two works from different countries.

Assign the students to research, or provide them with examples of landscape art from other times and places. Compare these pieces with the three landscapes from this CD, those by Campbell, Peacock, and Frazer.

Discuss the landscapes using the following and other questions. In what ways do the paintings use of light tell you something about the land and its people? Could any of these scenes have been present in more than one place and time? Would different artists at different times have painted them differently? If the contrasting paintings were designed in vivid, colorful, expressive words would the word picture or poetry make you feel the same?

You may want to assign the students to research and find answers to questions that arise during the discussion.

6. Theater

Objective: The students will demonstrate an understanding of the painting's theme or mood by acting out an appropriate scene.

Show the class the image of *The Dark Side of the Garden*. Discuss the mood of the painting and have the students write or find a scene that could use the garden pictured in the painting as the setting. An example of an appropriate scene is a forest scene from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with Puck and the fairies. The class can use a slide of the painting as a background and put a few objects or plants to set off the stage.

Have the students perform a readers' theater version of the chosen or written scene.

