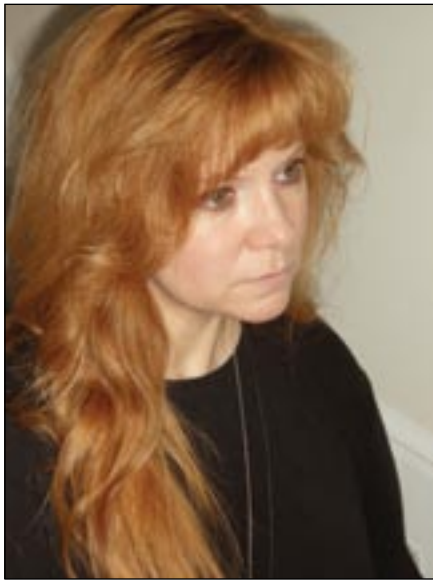


a PAINTER'S VOICE



GINA NOELLE ASH

BY SALLY PFOUTZ

Gina Noelle Ash describes herself as a metaphorical realist. She uses oils, acrylics and watercolors to create highly detailed works with intriguing titles like “Thorn Tree in the Garden.”

“Every birthday and Christmas as a child, I asked for brushes, paints, crayons [and] pencils,” she recalls. “I grew up in rural northeast Colorado, where my sister and I lived with my grandparents in an old house haunted by mysterious presences that—along with the landscape of cornfields and railroad tracks—provided lots of fuel for my imagination.” Gina loves animals and the natural world. Two watercolors, “The Window” and “Last Light,” pay tribute to the vibrant skies of her youth.

“I can’t remember a time that I was not drawing or painting,” says Gina. “My grandmother was a photographer with an interest in the arts, and she humored my endeavors, even when I was very young and absurdly intense. In a sense, she ‘freed’ me as an artist by allowing me to feel that the art I created didn’t have to make sense to anyone but me.”

Gina is a high-energy artist who works full-time but is also dedicated to creating new paintings—as many as fifteen are in the works for *Envisioned*, a two-person show with Judy Wengrovitz (élan, May 2003) continuing through December 18 at the Center for the

Arts of Greater Manassas/Prince William County.

The Center’s gallery director, Anna Mish, notes that Gina’s art “breathes an aura, or moodiness, that leaves the viewer searching out more, questioning her subjects’ thoughts or what their next move would be.”

Gina works for Fairfax County Government, providing advertising, graphics and Web design, and she is the webmaster and

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FACING PAGE: “TUESDAY IT RAINED,” ACRYLIC, 26” x 22”





a member artist at ArtBeat, a cooperative gallery in Manassas. She lives in Gainesville with her husband James, a government analyst and actor who also poses for her (“Tuesday It Rained”) and builds custom frames for her paintings. Gina and James enjoy traveling and hope to retire eventually to Scotland.



According to fine art photographer Linda Carlson, a fellow member artist at ArtBeat Gallery, “Gina’s work is evocative, hauntingly beautiful and technically superb. Somehow, she is able to peer through the looking glass with both childhood innocence and keen adult intellect. The work she then creates is a suspension of reality that is delightful to look at in the present and lingers on in one’s memory long afterward.”

While Gina always has a very specific idea about each painting and often researches subjects that she wants to include, she is very open to others’ interpretations. When her paintings are on display, she says, “I love to stand around listening to people’s thoughts.”

Her watercolor, “How Long Must I Wait for You?” is a good example. In the midst of a rather lively arrangement of brown autumn leaves and green heart-shaped ginger leaves topped with a red-ribboned bundle, an upturned human hand is revealed and is the source of much speculation.

Gina once overheard a viewer say it was a child’s hand. Another was sure the painting was about the changing seasons, while someone else thought it was about unrequited love. Gina’s intent is clear when she points to the painted border of tree branches in the sky around the painting to explain, “This is a dead person’s view.”

She mentions artists Ivan Albright, Andrew Wyeth, Frida Kahlo, Mel Odom and Remedios Varo as influences, adding that, “I’m drawn to illustrative works that hint at something private or secretive.” Long fascinated by fairy tales, Gina is enthralled with double meanings. For instance, she describes “Allegory (the Wolf)” as a twisted view of Little Red Riding Hood that asks the question,



is the wolf protective or captive?

"Thorn Tree in the Garden" shows a young Sleeping Beauty-type blonde peering through the window of a door. Is that a bullet hole in the window pane? Are tree roots growing up around the house? Gina has painted the tree's branches onto the frame, and the thorns are gilded. Is the young woman being held against her will or is she there by choice?

"Remembering Kayura" is based on a folk tale from the Bantu tribe of Africa. When lightning strikes, the children are told, "Don't be afraid, it's just little red birds sent down from the sky." The foreground features a young girl wrapped in a dusty green shawl and adorned with a lush red feather earring. The full moon rises in a sapphire sky behind her, and on either side, African Quiver trees rise up like protective columns. To Gina this painting signifies what children are often told: "If you're good, if you're heroic, things will turn out



for you. Some things that are frightening, like lightning, should not be."

Gina received formal training at the Art Institute of Colorado in Denver. A Signature member of the Virginia Watercolor Society, she has been the recipient of a number of awards. She has conducted workshops in Texas and has participated in an international virtual gallery project. Her work has been shown in many juried exhibits throughout Colorado, Texas, Maryland and Virginia. Asked how she feels about painting, Gina says: "My art is my voice—it tells my stories for me."

To see more of Gina's paintings, visit www.ginanoelleash.com.

FACING PAGE, TOP: "ALLEGORY (THE WOLF)," ACRYLIC, 24" x 28", AND "I WANTED MORE, I WANTED MORE TIME," OIL, 24" x 48"; THIS PAGE, TOP: "THORN TREE IN THE GARDEN," OIL, 24" x 30", AND "REMEMBERING KAYURA," ACRYLIC, 30" x 22"