



C.J. LORI

by Liz Goldner

WHATEVER DIRECTION I GO IN

CJ. Lori paints from her imagination, from a mind's eye that is so rich that trees float up into the sky, and the land and sky are intertwined. The artist's oils flow from her thoughts, from the landscapes she observes in her Boston area hometown and from the foreign places she visits. Her artworks, comprised of horizon lines, cliffs, bodies of water and trees, are so symbolic and complex that they demand time and attention to fully comprehend. Marc Gurton, owner of 13FOREST Gallery, Arlington, Massachusetts, explains, "Her paintings explore our relationship with nature through a lens of magical realism, surrealism, cosmology, and anthropomorphic transformation."

Lori's discusses "*The Trees Leaving*" series, in progress since 2005. "I pay homage in these paintings to the Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte who depicted men in bowler hats, floating up to the sky." When asked why she paints trees instead of people, she replies, "Trees are like people to me." Discussing Magritte, she explains, "He was idiosyncratic and into expressing his own voice." She also admires writer Henry James: "He believed that writers and artists be given the freedom to

present their personal views in their works."

Lori's painting, "*Ascension*," features a floating tree, sprouting autumn colored leaves, while its roots flutter out from the bottom. This anthropomorphic tree, drifting in a pale blue sky, reveals human-like loneliness. Surrounding the tree are eight panels, which progressively express the ascension from darkness and depression, as embodied by a crow and a spider-like space ship, to serenity at the top of the work, as symbolized by bucolic landscapes.

Her painting "*Leaving the Country*" begins as a traditional farm landscape with sheep grazing among the trees. Yet the vast blue sky that dominates the painting features several rooted trees that are gently floating up to the sky. When asked about the symbolism behind "*The Trees Leaving*" series, Lori says that they are allegorical and evocative of the rural landscapes in Europe. She adds that an important aspect of this series is that the trees are, "human-like and spiritually focused, expressing the strong connection between the land and us."

Marc Gurton discusses this series: "Lori investigates how an object, such as a tree, can be dislodged from its expected environment to emphasize its very nature and symbolism within our culture. Floating free from the earth her 'amputated' landscapes ask us to consider the fragility of our human connection to nature, as well as our own minds to our bodies."

Marjorie Kaye, Managing Artist at Galatea Fine Art in Boston says, "In examining possibilities, the artist actually exposes existing truths. We see the intricate root system of a tree. This can be interpreted in Jungian symbolism as an exposure of the complexity of the human subconscious, or the spider's web of intention present in every action or thought."

Another inspirational artist is George Inness, whose 19th century landscapes were influenced by the Hudson River School, by spiritualism. Lori quotes Inness, "The true use of art is, first, to cultivate the artist's own spiritual nature." Her "*After Hours, After Inness (Evening Landscape)*" painting with its lush landscape, dense evergreens, green-carpeted walkways and blue, gray and yellow sky, pays reverence to this seminal painter. "This work is based on an Inness painting," she says, "but I added the outside border and replaced the image of a farmer with an oxcart and oxen coming toward the viewer with a lone figure walking away from the viewer."

(left) **The Quiet Season**
oil on cradled panel, 24 x 24 x 2in., 2014



(top) **Harlech Rising Oil**
oil on canvas, 30 x 30 x 1.5in., 2008

(bottom) **After Hours, After Inness
(Evening Landscape)**
oil on cradled panel, 24 x 36 x 2in., 2010

(left) **Endeavor**
oil on canvas, 24 x 24 x 2in., 2010

In other Lori paintings, including “*Almost Solstice*,” “*Thirteen Nests*” and “*Warm Winter*,” warm red and orange skies dominate the canvasses, with several featuring her characteristic sparse trees. She says, “A lot of my paintings have bright colors and become like tableaux of visual explosion.” She thoughtfully adds, “I’m working toward finding more subtlety in my work, toward discovering the depth and quiet that I admire in Inness, while retaining the visual ‘pop’ of Magritte.” Several newer paintings do possess this kind of subtlety, including “*Between the Moments*” and “*Before the Long Winter*.” Both depict early winter landscapes with groves of barren trees, set against pale blue streams that echo the winter skies.

Lori’s more surrealistic paintings include “*Still Thinking*,” with its several stone heads (that are reminiscent of Michelangelo’s busts) peering out from behind the trees. Another is “*Persephone*,” featuring a bust of the Greek goddess of spring, with a tree sprouting from her hand. In several other paintings, she depicts Greek goddess busts as she has seen them during her travels—pitted and besmirched from the “acid rain.”

As an artist, Lori is an anomaly in the academically oriented Boston area. As a child, her primary interest was literature, influencing her to later study English at Boston University, graduating Magna Cum Laude. In her twenties, her interest in painting grew, and she attended the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts Continuing Education Program; but soon deciding to explore her artistic talents on her own, she left the Program. As she developed her abilities, she and her husband Larry decided that she should quit her day job and paint full time. She considers herself fortunate to be able to spend her workdays expressing herself through her artwork. And she attributes

the originality of her art in part to the fact that she developed into a painter organically, when the time was right, with little outside influence.

Lori lives “a simple life” with her husband of 32 years, and with her dog, Alexis. She works out of her large third-story studio, a light filled space with north facing windows, looking out at “beautiful trees that bloom overhead in the spring.” For recreation, she reads Henry James voraciously, walks her dog and watches football. She also finds inspiration in her neighborhood parks, in Cape Cod during the quiet off-season, and in her travels to foreign coasts and countrysides.

C.J. Lori, who has won several awards for her paintings and is widely exhibited in the greater Boston area and in Cape Cod, plans to continue creating rural and Cape Cod scenes, as well as her newer urban landscapes. “Whatever direction I go in,” she says, “I will follow my intuitions and work toward more mastery, more subtlety and of course more mystery.” Marjorie Kaye, who will show Lori’s paintings at Boston’s Galatea Fine Art in May 2015, explains, “What attracts me to C.J.’s work is the masterful painting and the endless ground for personal and universal interpretation.”

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