

Sailorwind

A Brief Autobiography

Bill Duncan, Artist
“Paintings that Paint Themselves”

Perhaps it's easier to remember your first creation better than it is to remember the first time you picked up a pencil or crayon. For me it was finger-paints and all those bright colors you could mush around with abandon on slick white paper and of course surrounding tablecloths, walls, floors etc. I am not exactly sure when that was, but the movement and rhythm has stayed with me and been an important part of my relationship to the world of art.

My art training began somewhere around the age of twelve in a garret above a saloon in Concord, Massachusetts. The teacher was named Dominick DePaola although perhaps I have the spelling wrong. I long since lost touch with him and can now find no record of his work. However, I do remember him well as a wonderful person and a fine artist. Drawing was an important first step and I drew a lot of squirrels and the like. And then eventually it was on to oil painting – a rather discouraged looking still life of a jug and apple. Then something happened. Mr. DePaola added some highlights. With a touch of alizarin and some light and dark brush strokes the jug and apple leaped to life in a momentary surge of energy, an experience that has inspired me to continue drawing and painting as I pursued education, a family and a career.

I still keep that painting of the jug and apple with Mr. DePaola's wonderful highlights and brush strokes. I post it here just for the fun of it ([add link here](#)). It reminds me that creation is through the hand, not by the hand. As an artist I take responsibility for the craft – the discipline, the practice, the training. This is intrinsic to a work of art, great or small. However, I do not take ownership of the creation itself. I have to leave that to masters far greater than myself. For me creation unfolds when it is ready. Attempting possession of it only limits the experience and halts the process. In short, for me paintings have to paint themselves.

My art is strongly influenced by the wind and the sea. I grew up in the summers on Southport Island near Boothbay Harbor, Maine. I spent most of the days on the water working with my Father, sailing day parties on the Friendship Sloop “Eastward.” I worked for two summers on the old “Balmy Days,” ferrying passengers back and forth to Monhegan Island. I taught sailing and crewed on several ocean races. After a while the movement of wind and waves enters the soul and somehow seeks to be released on paper and canvas.

As a teenager I studied with Norman Merritt of Boothbay Harbor. I remember him as a man of few words who, with a pen and brush, could so eloquently capture the life and spirit of Maine, Spain and Ireland. He drew trees that stood tall and bent to the wind and painted skies that could move with that wind across the canvas. I owe much to him and I hope it shows in my paintings. I intensified my interest in art ten years ago largely at the urging and encouragement of his wife Josephine.

While pursuing Japanese studies in Tokyo in my twenties I studied Japanese brush writing with a master calligrapher for two years. Japanese brush writing sings with a freedom of movement in line and poetry that can instantaneously capture the soul. However, putting that freedom of movement on paper takes years of intense discipline, concentration and practice. I remember spending two months on one brush stroke. I was never to become a master calligrapher, but the movement of the Japanese brush still finds its way from time to time through the water and onto the paper.

I am a member of the Alexandria Art League in Alexandria, Virginia, where I continue to study watercolor, oil painting and figure drawing with some of the finest artists in the country, among them Susan Herron and Priscilla Treacy to whom I owe much. My work has occasionally been juried into the Alexandria Art League monthly art shows and I was honored by the Alexandria Art League with an award for an acrylic painting entitled "Night Blossoms." I am also a member of the Boothbay Region Art Foundation where I show paintings during the summer and autumn months.

I value all of you who take the time, even for a brief moment, to look at my work and join me in a developing ever changing experience.

Bill Duncan

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