

Dancing in the Rain
by
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About the Series

“Whoever said happiness requires sunshine never danced in the rain.”
----- Anonymous

I hold this proverb fondly. It connects me with a core philosophy of my eastern European heritage. It embodies the conviction that what we encounter in life matters less than the spirit with which we encounter it, and that perseverance in adversity can be sweeter than advantageous circumstance. This frame of mind, this perspective, provided my ongoing focal point in the series of digital paintings called “Dancing in the Rain.”

While my images are abstract and my creative instruments were an electronic tablet and stylus, my strongest historical inspiration for this series came from the artists of the Florentine Renaissance. I have always been drawn to their love of geometry and their delight in detail for its own sake. I have admired their powerful, well-integrated compositions with strong interplay among parts of the whole. In working on “Dancing in the Rain,” I was privileged to have access to creative tools of which the masters could have only dreamed, as I centered my attention on the time-honored principles of color, form, and line.

I have been making art for several decades. Every few years I start with a clean slate and, turning away from what came before, initiate a new series of works. Although my various series have differed with respect to medium, size, style, and palette, certain artistic issues have been at the forefront of my thinking throughout my career.

Significant groundwork for “Dancing in the Rain” came from my series called “Ballerinas,” a group of small aquatints. In this medium, a false stroke of my tool could negate many hours



“Starburst” from the “Ballerinas” series, etching with aquatint, 10 x 10, ca 1985

of effort or even devastate an entire image, much like an ill-considered brushstroke on a quickly drying Renaissance fresco. My tightly detailed work in such an uncompromising medium taught me to sharpen my objective at the onset and to abide by it with steadfast discipline.

Paradoxically, in the course of this series I also came to appreciate the value of chance, of fortuitous happenstance, of the forces within an image that I could not control. I chose to create the texture for my aquatints by applying canned spray paint to my metal intaglio plate and allowing acid to eat away around the tiny splatters. Spray paint by its nature has a mind of its own, and therefore surprises came with the territory. Often I would find that these surprises had presented me with a circumstance which fired my mind with possibilities. I grew to treasure the chaotic and the unpredictable components of each image, as much as the factors that were under my strict control. I grew to savor the push and pull between the two.

In my “Rainforest” series, I expanded upon this aquatint technique by using not one but many coats of spray paint, layered between labor-intensive, tightly controlled coats of

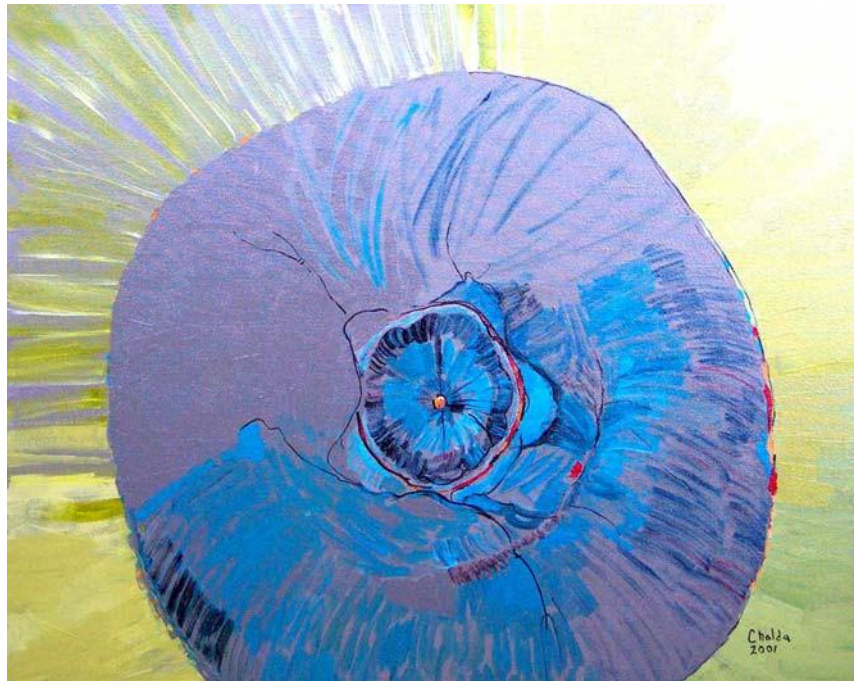


“Rainforest Spikes” from the “Rainforest” series, acrylics and spray paint on panel, 16 x 12, ca 1992

acrylic paint. I would apply an acrylic layer in painstaking detail with tiny, several-haired brushes. Then I would dust the image with a coat of spray paint, which alternately obscured and spared some of this detail, adding texture and simulating the effect of drifting mist amid dense, lush foliage. With each such layer, providence presented me with a new set of visuals to work with, or against, with my miniscule brush.

My interest in abstraction developed gradually over several series. I increasingly relished the many small and exquisite abstracts that reside within any representational work. As I developed my “Ballerinas” series, for example, I would work and rework sections where a fragment of garment would drape, fold, glisten, and alter in transparency. Often I would observe that such a section felt complete within itself.

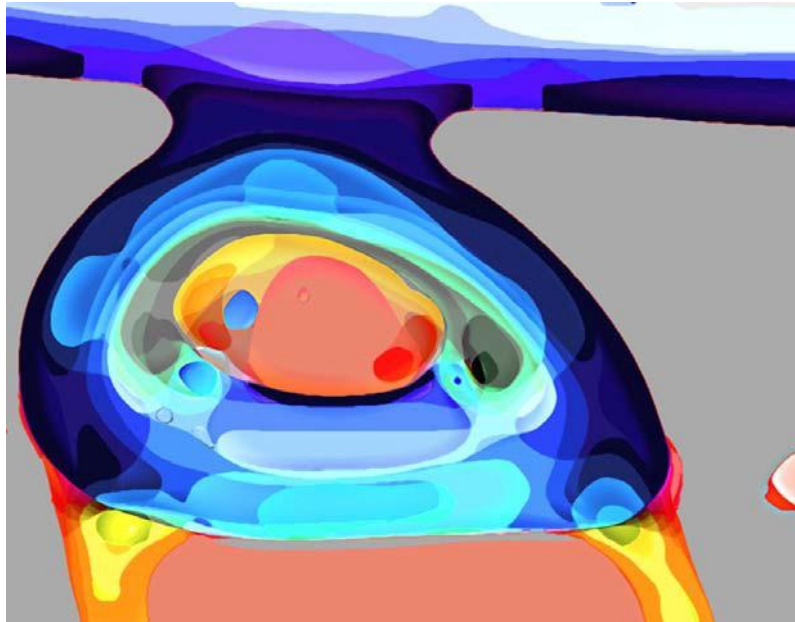
Pursuing this notion further, I embarked on my “Close-Ups” series. Here I sought new perspectives on familiar objects by depicting them at a range in which they are seldom



“Blueberry” from the “Close-Ups” series, acrylics on canvas, 26 x 20, 2002

viewed. Each tightly composed image showed some physical object in a conventional three-dimensional geometry, but at a proximity in which its exact identity might not be obvious. The precise nature of an object declined in importance as it dissolved into its more generic atomic components. The interaction among the parts of a whole gained in importance. The distinction between the representational and the abstract lost consequence. The artistic experience became one of texture, line, color, and detail.

Strong underpinnings for “Dancing in the Rain” developed with my “Rites of Passage” series of digital paintings. Here I began to investigate the symbolic potential in abstract art. For example, “Sacred Trance” depicted the process of turning away from our light-bathed familiar landscape (upper portion) and venturing inward, to the intricate chambers of our spiritual core.



“Sacred Trance” from the “Rites of Passage” series, digital painting, 28 x 22, 2003

I approached “Dancing in the Rain” motivated by a proverb and a philosophy of life. Again, my intent was to imbue my abstracts with symbolic and emotional, as well as aesthetic, content. I rejected the word “nonrepresentational” for this series, because the works would undeniably represent something, though not something tangible. I recognized that, more real and more familiar to us than the objects we encounter in this physical world, are the feelings and the values that we share.

Selecting the digital medium for this series, I found the near-infinite visual possibilities exhilarating and boggling. The discipline that I had acquired when working with unforgiving acid and metal in my “Ballerinas” series served me well, since the proliferation of options in this new medium continually tempted me to stray from my course.

I discovered computer software to be an unlikely source of kismet. As with the tiny splotches of errant spray paint that plagued and delighted me in the “Rainforest” series, the fantastically numerous operations of the machine often combined to give a result that I could not have foreseen, and that therefore seemed random to me. Thus my longtime fascination with the dialog of control and loss of control, order and chaos, found new breeding ground.

My mind has always tended to conceive a composition in terms of layers. I have long been drawn to media conducive to developing an image stratum by stratum across the entire frame, such as aquatint. In the technology of this medium, the fundamental building block of an image is a layer. When doing a landscape in aquatint, for example, it is not practical to work on the tree first, then the hill; one must work on everything in the entire image that will be a certain shade of grey in the final print, then work on everything that will be another shade. One is forced to address the entire surface of the image as a unit. I had considered this aspect of the aquatint technology to be a boon rather than an encumbrance. When I began using the computer for my art, I found a tool which uniquely facilitated my inherent mental process in this regard, a tool in which the layer was a formalized construct. Its superior capacity for building an image from the ground up was vital in helping me construct the strongly integrated compositions for “Dancing in the Rain.”

I looked to the classical masters for a sense of humanism in the general temper of this series, and for an abiding respect for science. Consequently, even in the unreal world of

my abstracts, the cause-and-effect laws of physics still apply; light reflects from one surface to another, moisture condenses, shadows are cast. A spatial geometry, even if unconventional, still presides.

A detail of “Rewriting History” (Plate 17) depicts a cosmos where objects with an obvious plasticity emerge from an atmospheric haze, and where three-dimensional forms are allowed to interact with those that seem to exist only in two dimensions. A detail of “Piercing Chill, Unnoticed” (Plate 11) shows waterdrops catching light and bending its rays in a believable manner. A very small waterdrop atop a larger one, though illuminated by an incongruous light source, has the wherewithal to cast a credible shadow. A definite logic exists in these images.

Several times in this series I employed the popular Renaissance motif of false-framing, as in “Recalling a Fond Memory” (Plate 5) or “Saving the Trump Card” (Plate 8). With such a composition, the eye’s tendency is first to discount the outlying margins, then to redefine the whole to include them. The false-framing offers the viewer the opportunity to enjoy the detail, color, line, and proportions of the piece from two separate standpoints.

More importantly, I saw false-framing as a way to extend to the viewer an extra cushion from externalities, a bid to experience the piece on a more intimate level. It was a means of gently inviting the onlooker to encounter the image on his or her personal terms, much like the ballerina in “Starbust” who dances not for any audience, but for herself.

My frequent depiction of waterdrop details served as more than the obvious allusion to the theme of the series. Introducing a tactile element was a device to involve the viewer on a sensory level. It was a tool to help define spatial geometry. It functioned as an integrating factor, since other parts of the image could be reflected in or be distorted by the waterdrop.

The affective content of the images was a challenge, since a viewer’s reaction is so individual. I repeatedly employed techniques to suggest backlighting or inner glow, effects which I believe elicit a near-universal response of warmth and gratification. For instance, the detail from “Staring Down Outrageous Fortune” (Plate 23) suggests a light source deep within the image, more dependable and reassuring than one from without. Every single object in the frame basks in its hospitality.

I utilized an ebullient palette and compositions rich in dynamic diagonals, often counterposed with bolstering spheres or disks, to help convey such qualities as fortitude, grace, and humor. In “Dawn Conquers the Storm” (Plate 9), for example, the central brilliant yellow disk might read as the sun, about to emerge from the mist to provide dry radiance to the weather-beaten diagonal blades of grass. But it could just as easily symbolize any central mainstay or inner citadel, prepared to advance to the troubled foreground when summoned.

I hope viewers find enjoyment and enrichment in this group of artworks. I dedicate the “Dancing in the Rain” series to each day’s wins and losses, serendipity and hard knocks, and our overriding will to prevail.