

Under the Influences of...
Creating and Recognizing Your Best Work



Liz Walker
www.lizwalkerart.com

Realize that EVERYTHING is an influence

Diebenkorn/Matisse exhibit in 2017 in San Francisco



What/Who influences us?

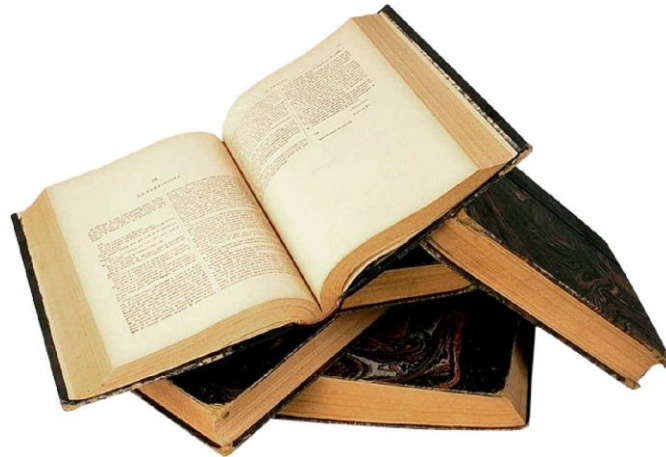
- Other artists' work (past and present) in galleries and museums
- Images on the internet & on social media
- Workshop instructors
- Artists who have solved a problem we are trying to resolve in our own work

4 “tent poles” of Artistic Authenticity

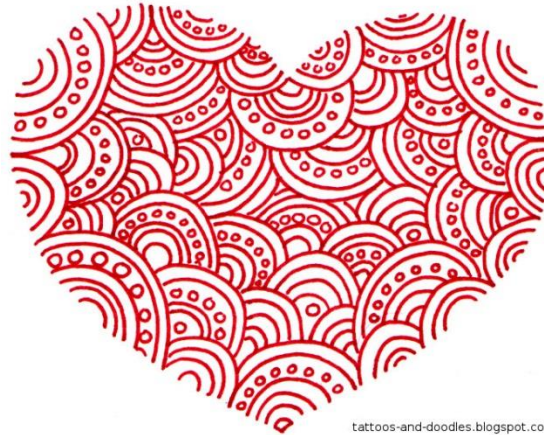
1. Personal, Recognizable Style
2. Innovative Borrowing
3. High Standards
4. The Need for Recognition

1: Personal Style

Art is a dialogue: I've found my own recognizable style and I try to tell a story that viewers find compelling.



All creative journeys begin with a challenge to introspection, to fathom not only what's "out there", but what's "in here." -Donna Zagotta



tattoos-and-doodles.blogspot.com

2: Innovative Borrowing

Free yourself from the “tyranny of technique”



I take ONE thing I've learned in a workshop and incorporate it into my work.

Borrow, don't steal!

“If you copy me, I get all the credit!” –Carla O'Connor



3: High Standards

- Learn to be your own (best) critic; be honest!
- “If you don’t love your painting, no one else will!” -- Donna Zagotta
- Aim to create work that stands apart from the rest (but is still influenced by the art tradition)
- Compare your works--“A” list vs. “B” list paintings

If you want your work to get noticed,
make sure it “walks funny” –Geoff McCormack



4: The Need for Recognition

Your audience and/or your desire for sales will dictate the kind of art you produce.



Three kinds of paintings...show, sale, and personal

Be Yourself...Everyone Else is Taken

If you haven't connected your work with yourself, your painting will never be alive.—Nancy Hillis

What really counts and what really makes us better artists is delving deep into what makes us unique, what obsesses us, what we can't live without. —Ruth Armitage

Art To the Rescue

- Grew up in Texas; Art major in college
- Computer industry (data entry, technical writing) for 10 years (no art)
- Moved to CA and then to the Boston area (1988-1999)
- In 1990 at age 32, unhappy at work, I took a Saturday watercolor class and fell in love with painting!
- Created 100 paintings in the first year

First Watercolor

“Spring outside my window”, 1990



Copyright Liz Walker, 2021

Art Became a Priority

- Kept painting, daughter born in '93; still working full-time (but miserable)
- Quit the day job in 1997 to raise our 4 yr old and to PAINT! Daughter's naptime = my painting time!
- Took more classes, subscribed to magazines, read technique books, formed a critique group with art friends.

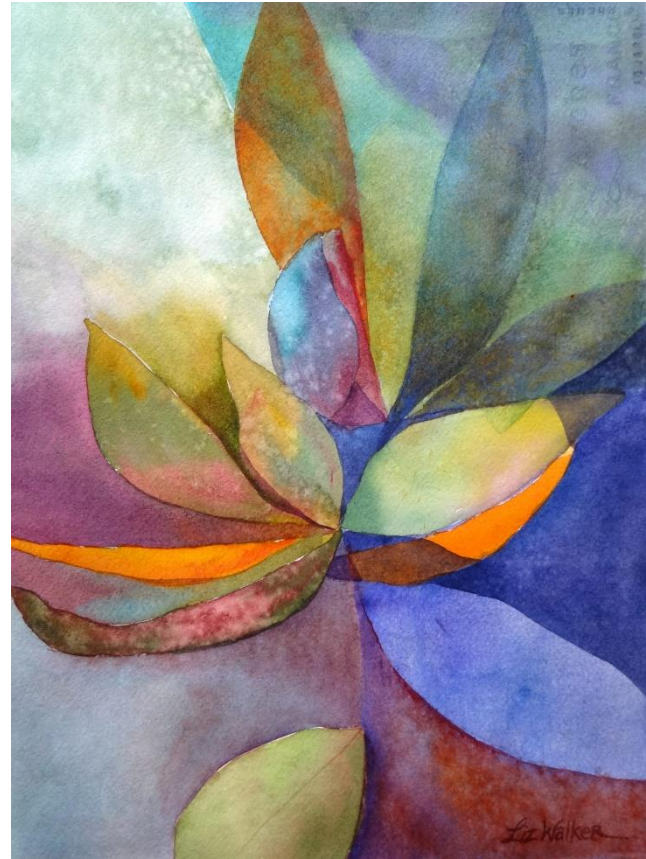
Embracing a life of art is the best decision I ever made.

Watercolor: 100 paintings in one year (it's only paper; the more I painted, the more I learned)

Cut Flowers, 1991



Leaf Forms, 2002



Starting Over (Again)

- Moved from Boston, MA to Portland, Oregon (husband's new job) in 1999
- Started over at 40: made new friends and found art connections (volunteered)
- Joined WSO (Watercolor Society of Oregon) in 2002 and began attending conventions, lectures, and workshops by national artists
- Submitted my work to state and local juried exhibits
- Joined several critique groups
- Took experimental watermedia workshops by Pat San Soucie, Dianne Locati, Ruth Armitage—forcing me out of my comfort zone
- Began teaching watercolor in 2002 at the community ed center—this informed my own work

We Artists Are On A Quest

My goal is to show you:

How the practice and habit of making art,
And acknowledging our influences,
Can help us become better, more productive
artists

I Used to Believe...

- That I had to paint from photographs
- That I had to learn how to draw before I could paint
- That figures had to be anatomically correct
- That if I followed all the **rules**, I'd be a successful artist!

Happily, I was wrong.

If the man who paints only what he sees before him were an artist, the king of artists would be the photographer.

It is for the artist to do something beyond this. – James Whistler

Beyond Technique



Who Am I Painting FOR? – Ruth Armitage

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Making It Up As I Go: Working From My Imagination (demo in front of students)

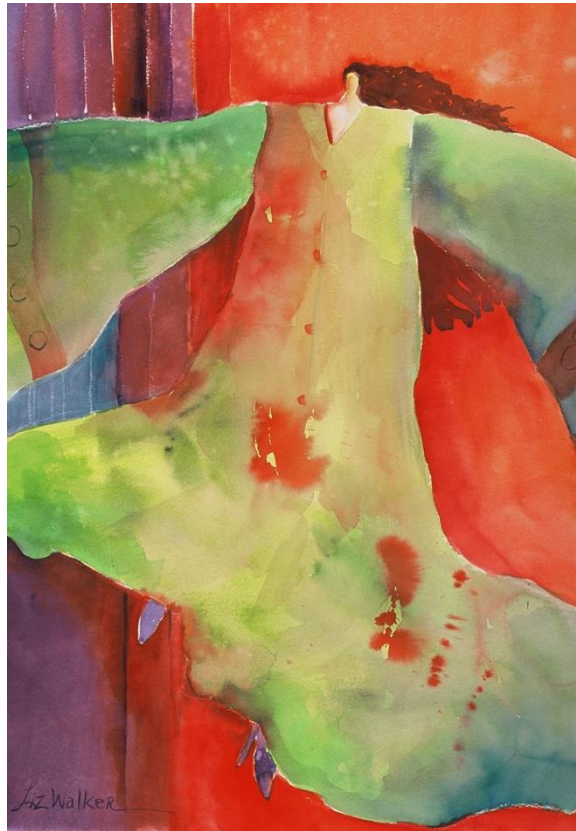
Artist's Hands by Liz Walker



Copyright Liz Walker, 2021

Making It Up As I Go (Working From A Prompt) (Raisin Head)

Free Falling by Liz Walker



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Changing My Approach to Painting

- Began working from imagination and memory (no photos—no copyright issues)
- Permission to paint without knowing the outcome
- Paint first, decide on the subject matter later (cloud watching)
- No realism required—paint shapes that *resemble* the human form—your audience will get it!
- No more “painter’s block” or wondering “what to paint”
- By breaking some of the **rules**, I became a happier, more productive artist

Suddenly, everything made sense!

Influenced by Subject Matter

Why The Blank Faces?

On The Town by Harold Walkup



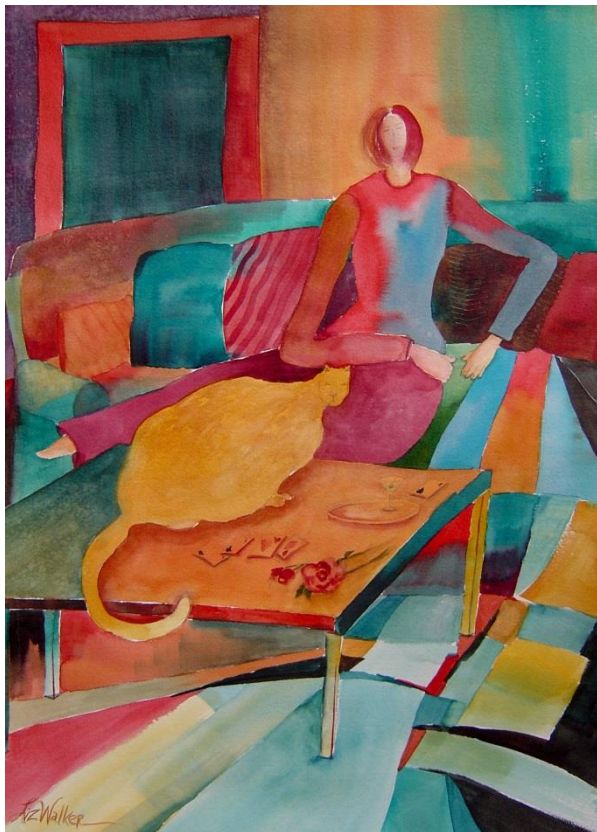
Lap of Luxury by Liz Walker



Learning to Analyze a Painting

What Works Well?

Sofa Seat Series by Liz Walker (28 paintings over 10 years)



- “Z” composition moves you in & out of the painting
- Limited palette of phthalo blue, Winsor red, and quin gold
- Variety of values
- Overlapping shapes in various sizes

Art That Goes Beyond the Ordinary

- *My work stands out because I try to be fearless. I try to take chances with my work and to be as intuitive as possible.*
- *The content of the work is the most important thing. When I view a show, the pieces that stand out to me are the ones that show the artist's complete passion. -- Ruth Armitage*

What Makes a Great Painting?

- Award winning paintings seem to embody more than *just* technique
- Jurors highlight the “big 3”:
 - color
 - composition
 - but above all, **CONTENT**
 - connects us to the work by telling a story and conveying an emotion
 - Invites the audience to linger in front of your piece a bit longer

Standing At An Artistic Crossroads

- Listening to jurors, I wondered: “What was MY work trying to say?”
- Was I playing it safe with my familiar colors and compositions?
- After 15 years, I was bored with the constraints of watercolor & repetition of teaching new students

It was time to learn something new!

2006: From Watercolor to Acrylics



Luck of the Draw by Liz Walker (acrylic monotyping)

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Acrylics: A Whole New World!

- Learned monoprinting- acrylic paint on plexiglass printed onto paper Strathmore Aquarius II 80 lb
- Painted on watercolor paper treated with gesso or on canvas
- Quick drying time--no more waiting
- Vibrant colors go down and stay down
- Opaque white/black is allowed!
- Worked on multiple paintings
- Repurposed old watercolors with acrylics
- Added acrylic collage to paintings

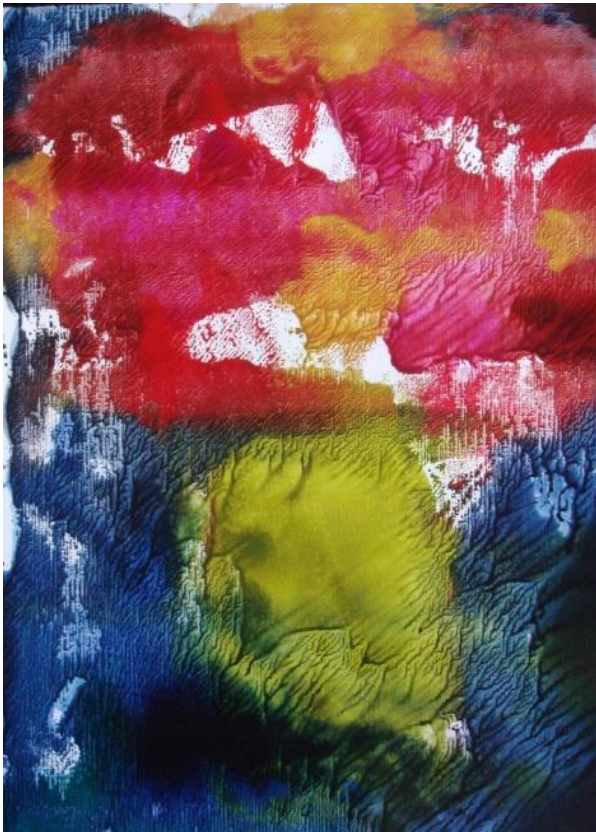
Acrylic Paints: Thick and Thin

Golden Fluid Acrylics – Transparents and Opaques



Before and After (negative painting)

Monoprint

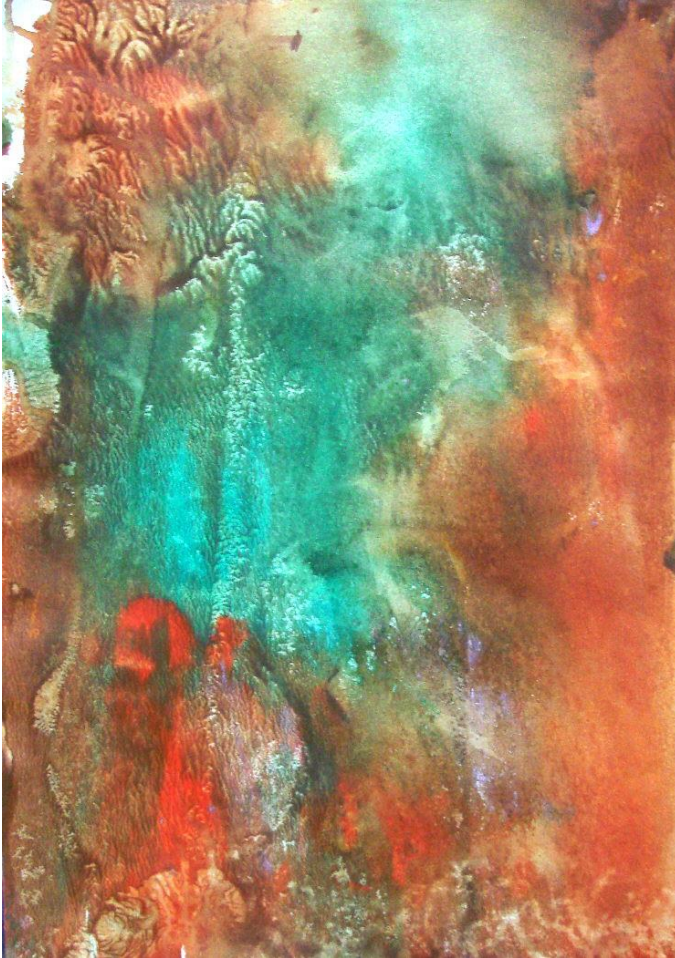


Finished painting



Paint First, Draw Second: “Cloud Watching” Method

Step 1: Monoprint



Step 2: Drawing with water soluble crayon

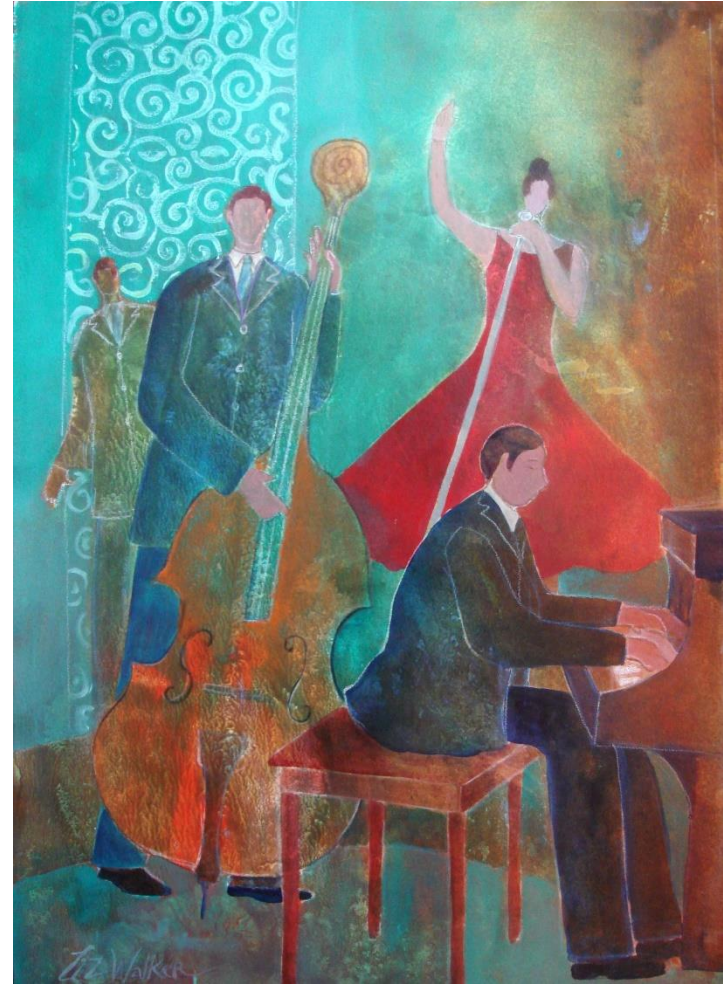


Jazz Trio #5

Step 3: Paint the Positive Shapes



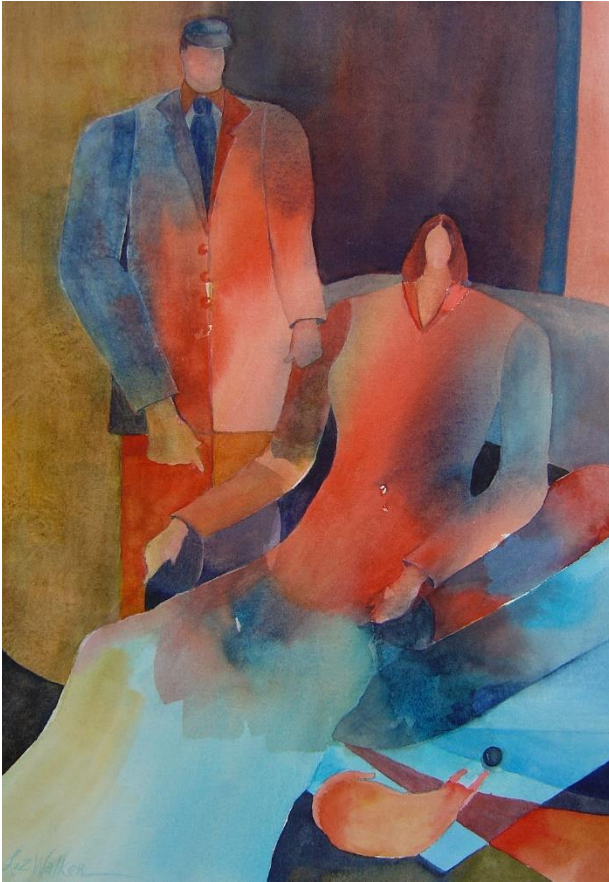
Step 4: Finished "Jazz Trio #5"



Similar Style & Subject Matter

Acrylics = Stronger Color/Intensity

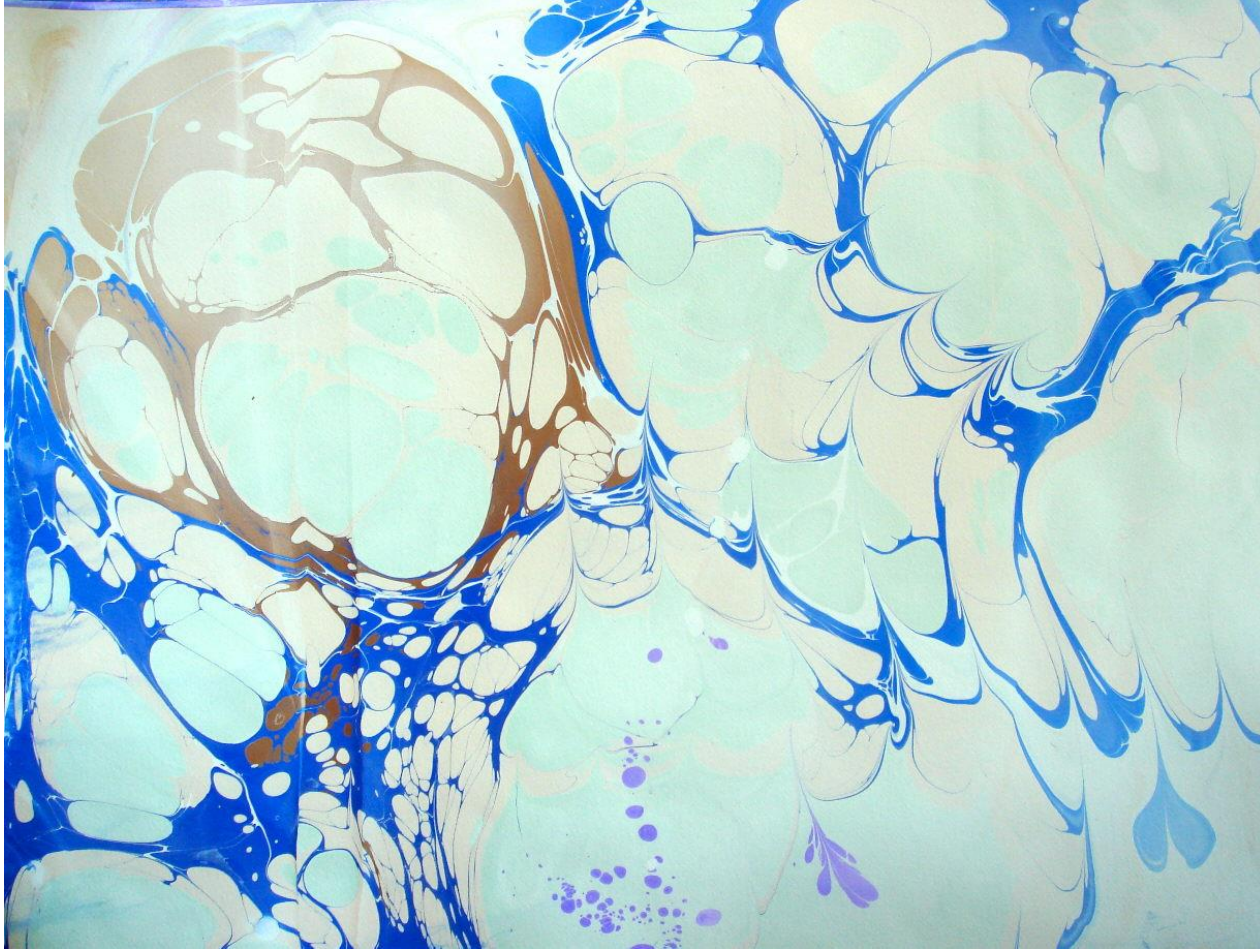
Watercolor: Lap of Luxury



Acrylic Monotype: The Suitor



2007 New Technique: Acrylic Marbling



Step 1: Acrylic marbled paper, 15 x 22"—Now what?

Carving Out Subject Matter



Step 2: Paint AROUND the shapes

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A Style is Born! (Modern Marbling)



Another Round #1 by Liz Walker, 18 x 24" on paper

Acrylic Marbling on Canvas

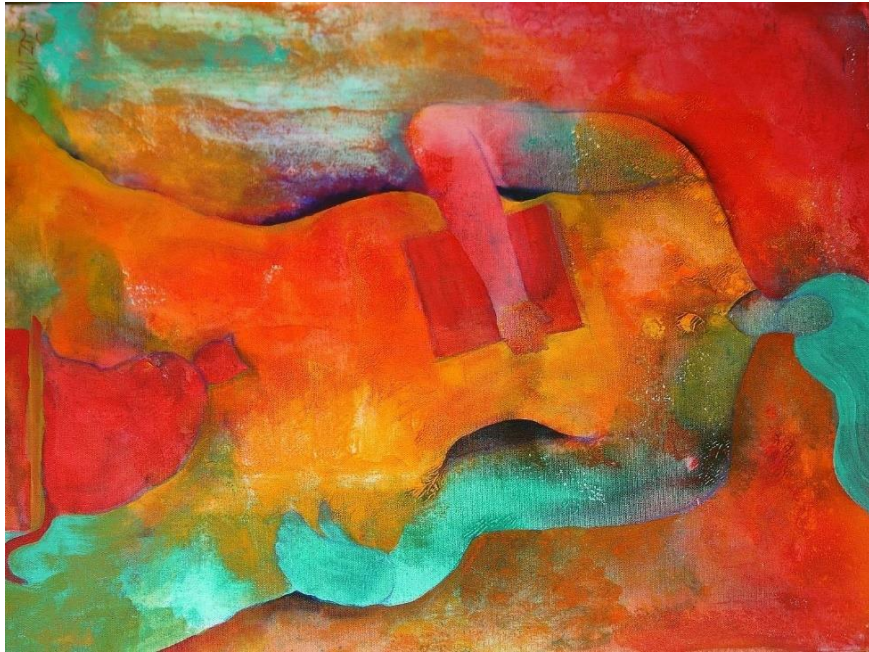
But....Is it a TRICK?



Speckled Pears #1 by Liz Walker

Copyright Liz Walker, 2021

Marbling Over an Old Canvas to Create “Speckled Pears”



Old Canvas



Canvas after Marbling



Speckled Pears #1, 18x 24" canvas by Liz Walker

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Working in a Series: Luck

Family Illnesses/Deaths

Holding All The Cards

by Liz Walker



Know When To Hold 'Em

by Liz Walker

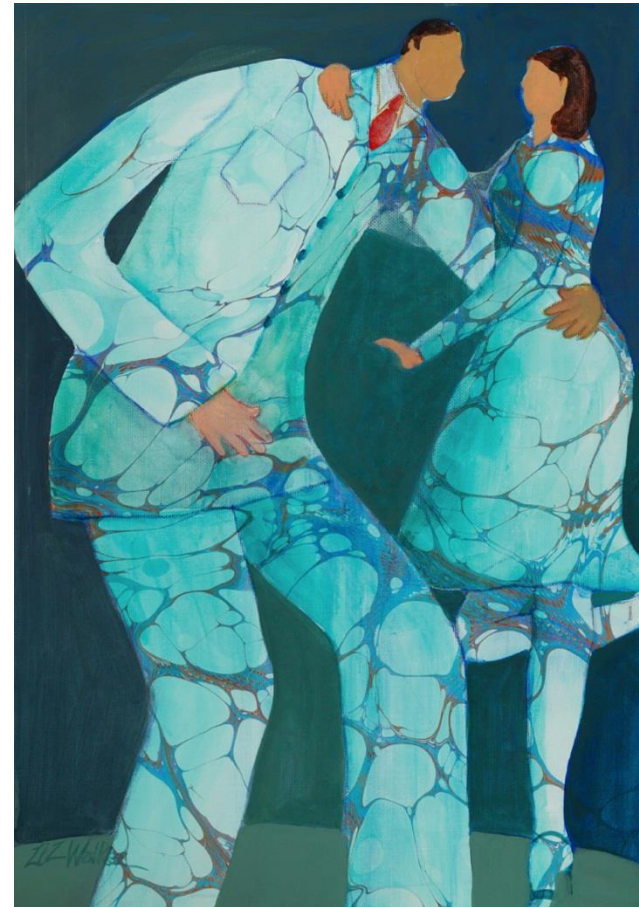


Working in a Series: Romantic Couples

On The Town by Liz Walker
(started with the shoe)



Come Away With Me
by Liz Walker



Combining Collage & Marbling

On the Rocks With a Twist by Liz Walker



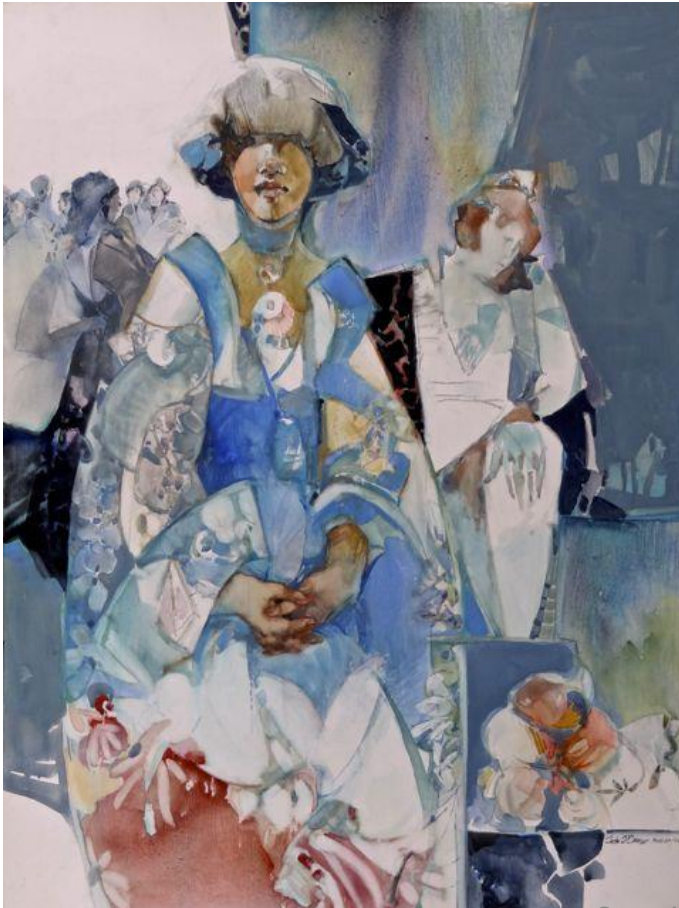
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Influenced by Design Choices

Large, Central Figure w/supporting figures

Even in the Quietest Moments #12

Blue Figure by Carla O'Connor



by Liz Walker (2012)



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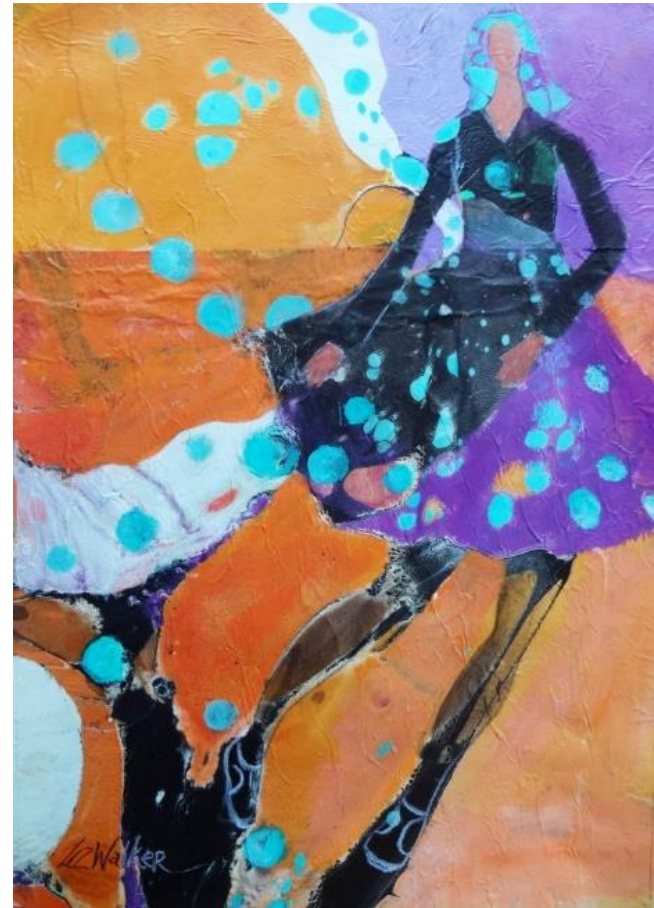
Influenced by Style and Composition

Exaggeration/Distortion

Birthday by Carolee Clark



Bubbly Personality #1 by Liz Walker

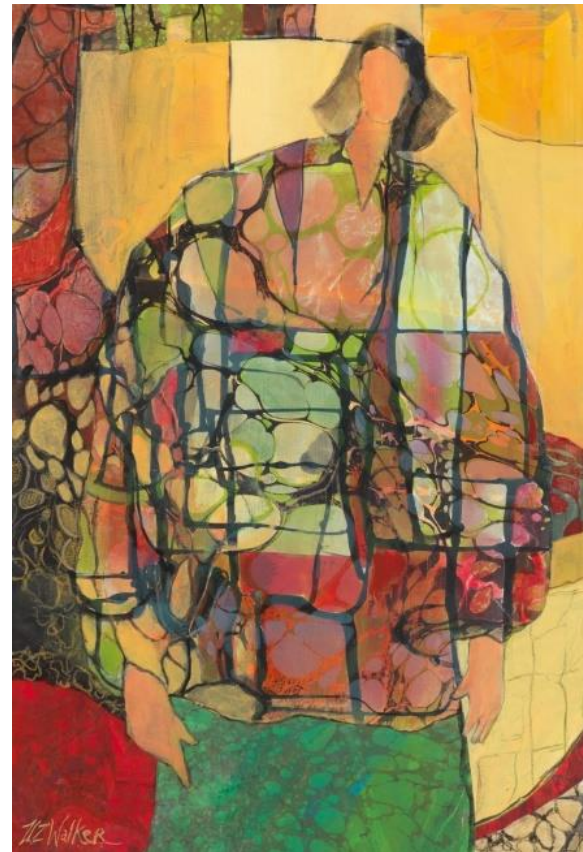


Influenced by Pattern and Shape (solid background to offset patterns)

Azure by Mary Carlton



Coat of Many Colors #1 by Liz Walker



Headed in the Right Direction

Now (circa 2014) I had...

- A way to put my personality/story into my work
- A method of applying paint (acrylic marbling)
- A better understanding of my influences
- A consistent habit of painting each day
- More “hits” than “misses”; won awards in regional shows; was accepted into natl’ shows
- A goal to attain Signature Membership in NWS

Getting to the Next Step

I was highly motivated and had:

- Passion for the work (time seems to disappear)
- A desire for community, acceptance and validation from other artists
- Willingness to compare one's work to other artists working in a similar vein
- The ability to take risks and “aim for the ceiling”

Aim for the Ceiling

If adhering to the formal rules of art are the “floor”, I was ready to aim for the ceiling.



Reaching a Milestone (12 years—24 paintings)

National Watercolor Society (NWS) Signature Membership 2015

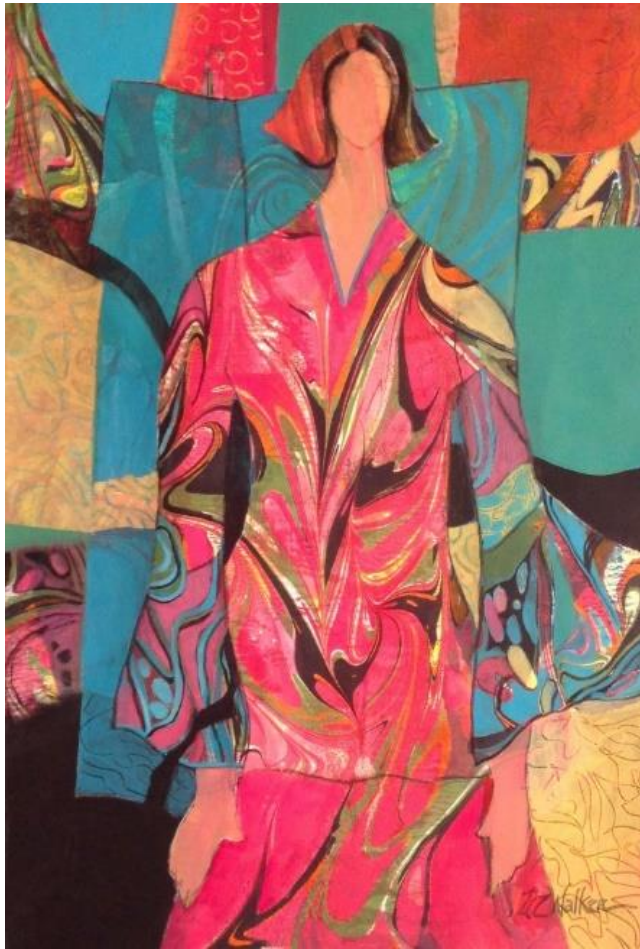


Chaco Canyon Conversation #1, acrylic/marbling/collage

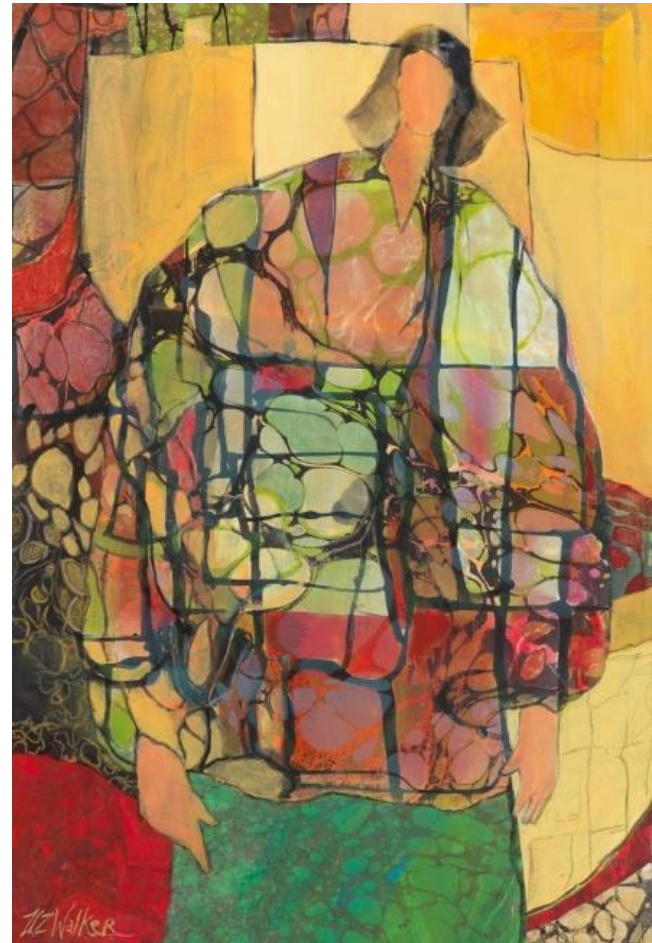
Signature NWS Status

Requires 3 Supporting Paintings—Cohesive Body of Work

“Coat of Many Colors 7”

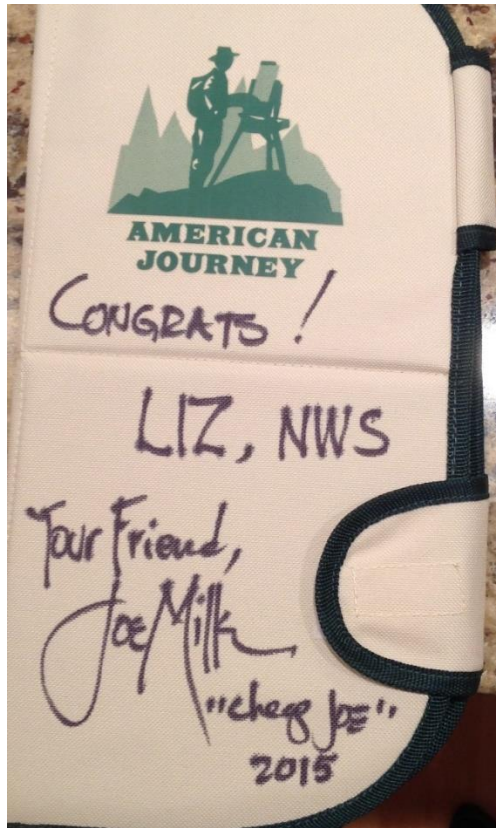


“Coat Of Many Colors 1”



Signature NWS Status

Portfolio of Brushes from
"Cheap Joe" Miller



NWS San Pedro Gallery
Signature Members Class of 2015



Became part of a group committed
to excellence: I'd found my PEOPLE!

Coming Down Off Cloud Nine...

- Came home with a sense of excitement but wondered “what’s next?”
- Didn’t want to lose my momentum or rest on my laurels
- Formed a critique group with 4 Oregon artists (also NWS Signature members)—to hold each other accountable and set new goals; we call ourselves “Critical Mass” and we’re still together

**I continued to embrace my
influences!**

Influenced by Color and Shape

Of Kimonos and Kabuki by Carla O'Connor



Copyright Liz Walker, 2021

Collage and Marbling – Variety of Shapes

Waiting In The Wings #1 by Liz Walker

Honorable Mention Award in Artist's Magazine, wrote 2016 article



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Persist!

If you give up on your [art] when you aren't happy with it, then all you ever learn is how to start. You never learn how to finish.

–Ira Glass



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*Starting a painting is easy;
finishing it requires that I spend
many hours thinking about and
looking at my paintings.*

*My best (show) paintings are the
ones that I take the time to truly
FINISH.*

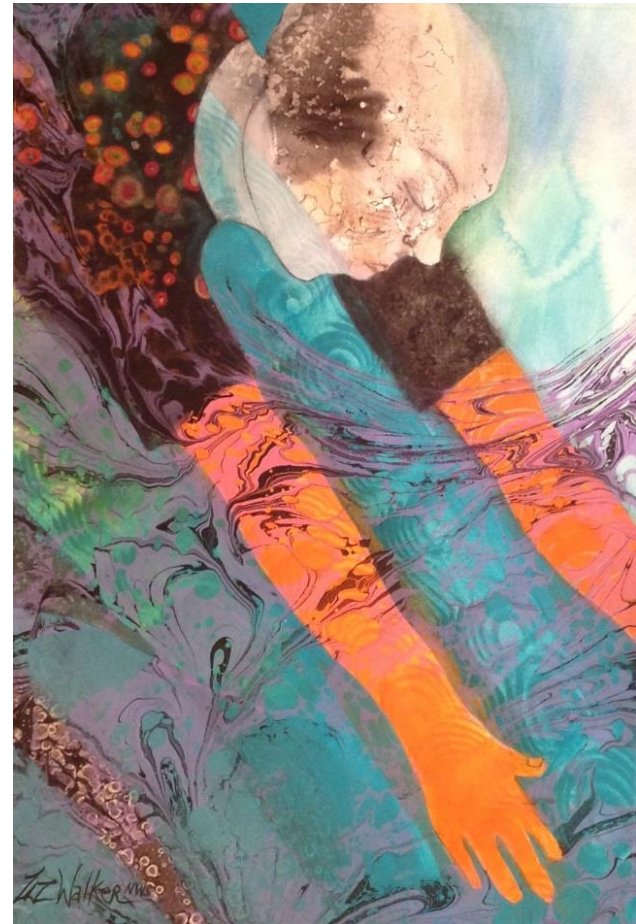
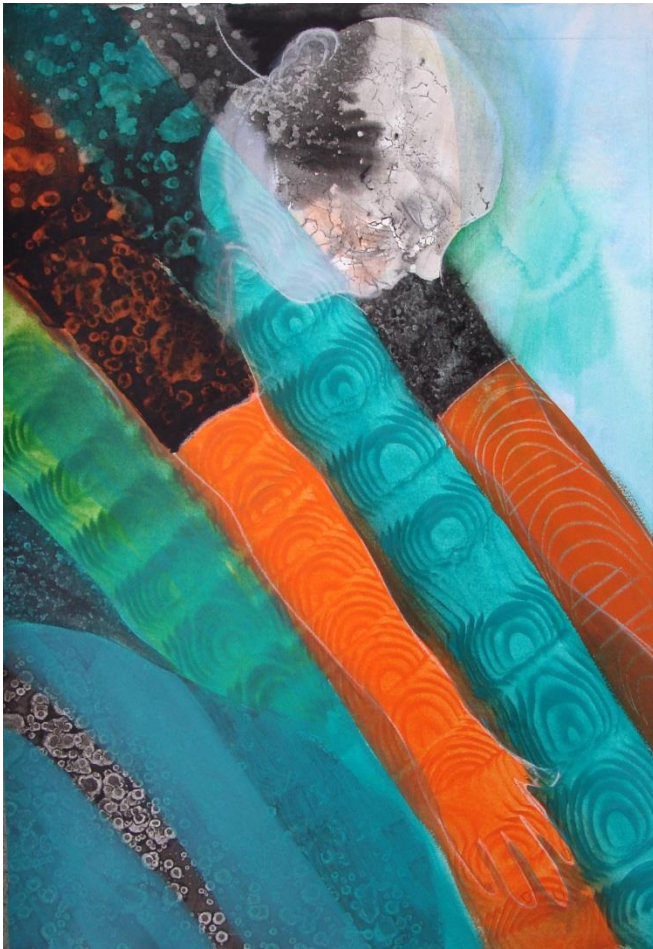
–Liz Walker

A painting is finished when...

- *There's nothing you want to add or take away*
- *Your critique group convinces you it's finished*
- *Your audience SAYS it's finished*
- *A customer buys it and takes it out of your hands so you can't paint on it anymore (Stan Kurth)*

Breakthrough: Reviving an Old Painting

(reworking a 6-year old demo with marbling)



Diving In by Liz Walker

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Influenced by Subject Matter

Yellow Dress by Wayne Thiebaud



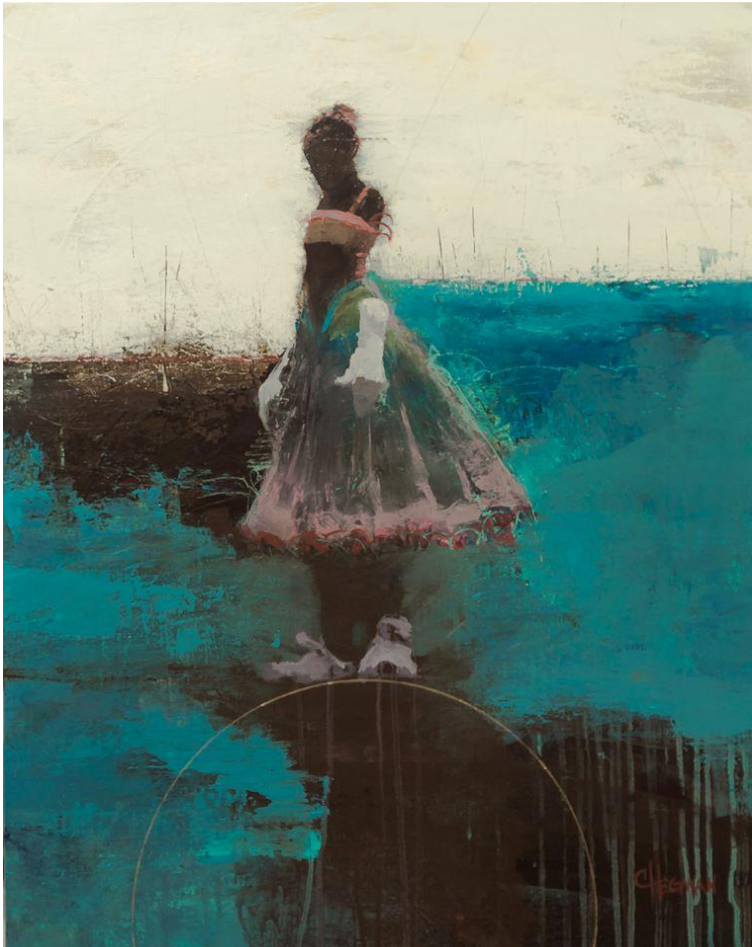
Hanging Dress #1 by Liz Walker



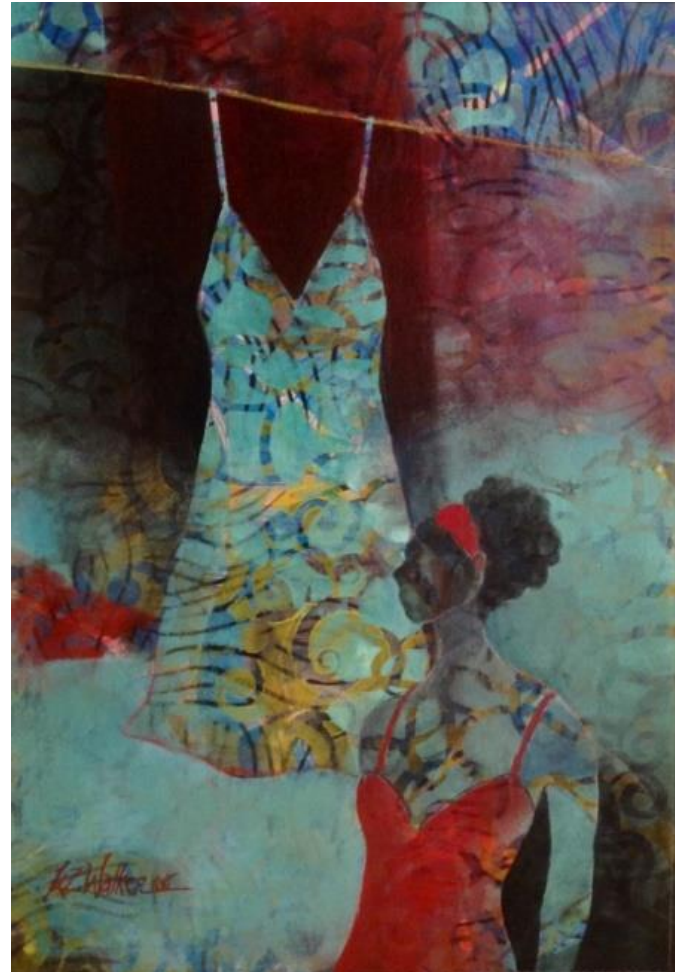
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Influenced by Value

Party Dress by Cat Hegman, NWS

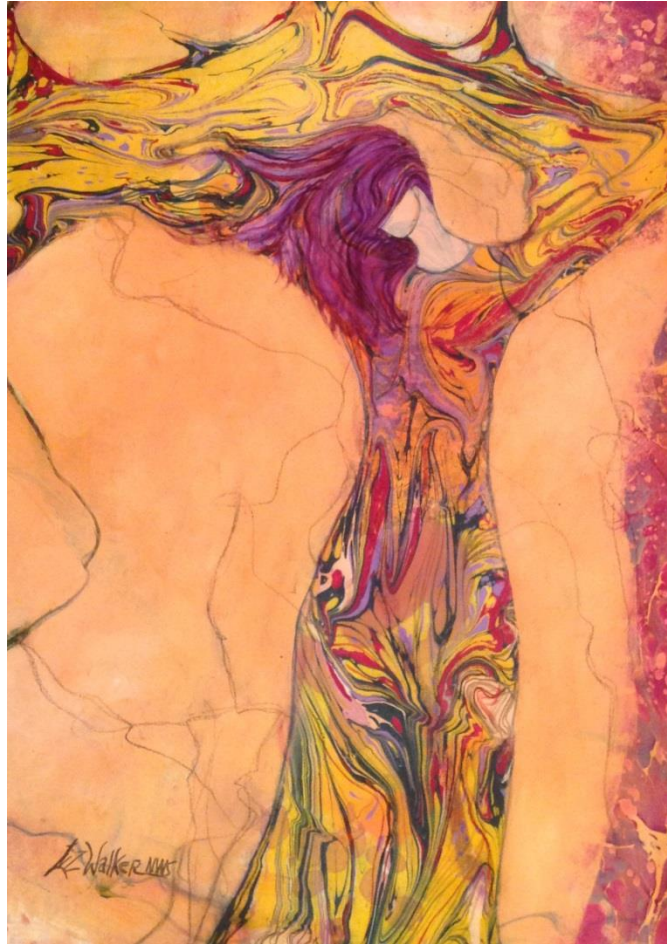


Hanging Dress #3 by Liz Walker, NWS



Breakthrough: Minimal Marbling

(everyone's marbling—now what?)



Windswept #5 by Liz Walker

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Influenced by Graphic Design

Dominant Neutrals with a spot of bright color

NY Times Illustration



Thoughtful Scholar #1 by Liz Walker



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Marbling with Neutral Colors

Creating a sense of story and place—eclipse



That Night #1 by Liz Walker

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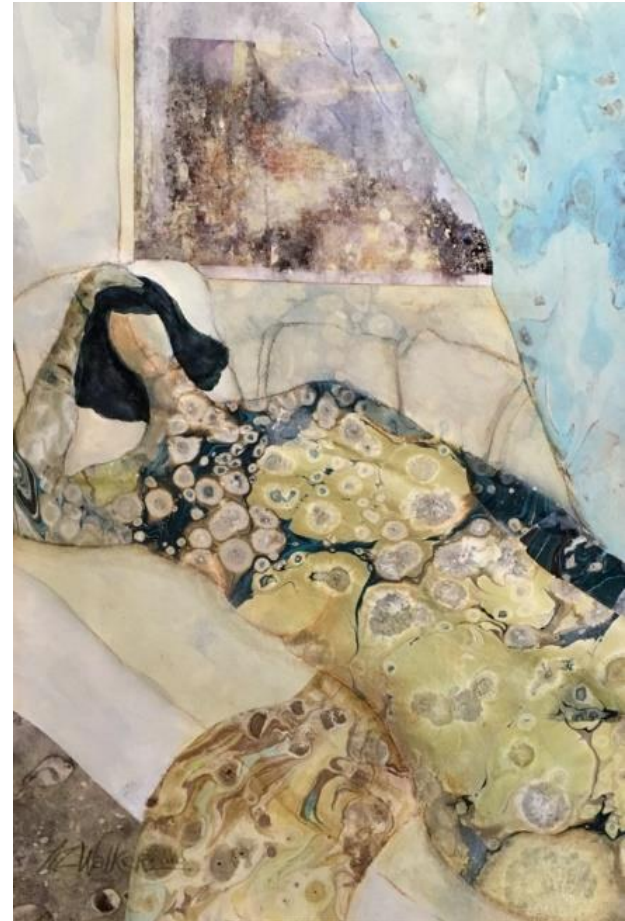
Influenced by Art History

Olympia by Manet



Odelisk with Blue Curtain

by Liz Walker



The difference between a master and a beginner is that the master has failed more times than the beginner has ever tried.



Breakthrough Technique: Acrylic “Skins”



Surrounded By Sky; rejected from NWS show; 3 weeks later, won ISEA online exhibit - 4th place award

Copyright Liz Walker, 2021

Creating Acrylic “Skins”



Palette: Freezer Paper wrapped/taped around a board



Dried acrylic is peeled off the palette; saved on wax paper; glued on to painting with PVA glue and matte medium mixture

Influenced by Shape/Subject Matter

Lunatic Fringe by Stan Kurth



On Solid Ground #2 by Liz Walker



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Influenced by Subject Matter

Responding to Current Events

Father and Children by Ben Shaun



Border Crossing #1 by Liz Walker



How To Be Influenced By Other Artists

- Don't get too self-involved—focusing solely on your own work is boring and unsustainable
- Explore different artists/techniques—what can you learn from looking at their work?
- Form alliances with artists whom you admire
- Interview another artist and give a talk or write an article about his/her work

Geoff McCormack

Early Major Influence: Trompe l'oeil
(Fr. “deceive the eye”)



Dali by Otto Duecker

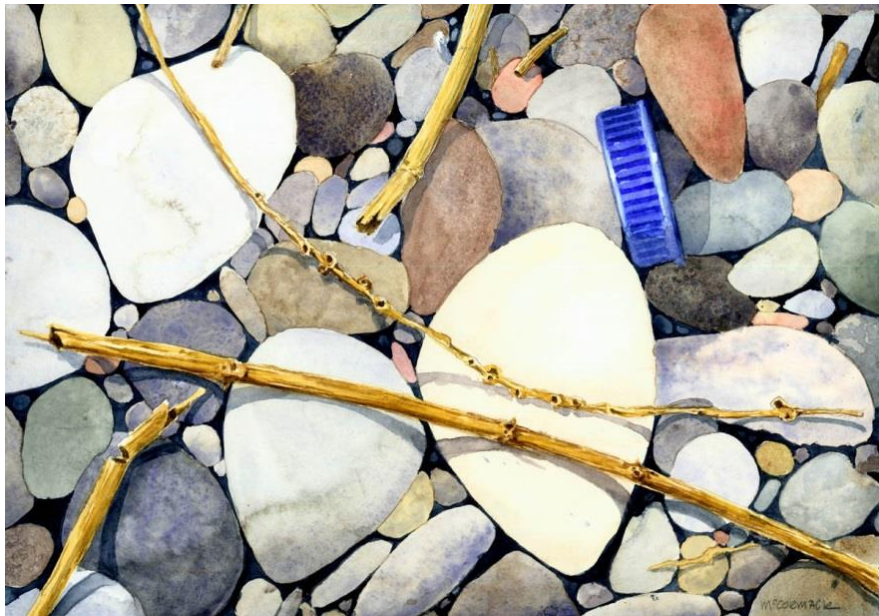


Violin by Jan Van Der Vaardt

Geoff McCormack, NWS, AWS

Defying the Flat Picture Plane

Greek Stones Speak



Three Rivers (series)



Reflecting on his artistic success, Geoff says:

**“I quit everything I don't do well
and got going on the things I do
well.”**

Geoff McCormack's Keys to Success

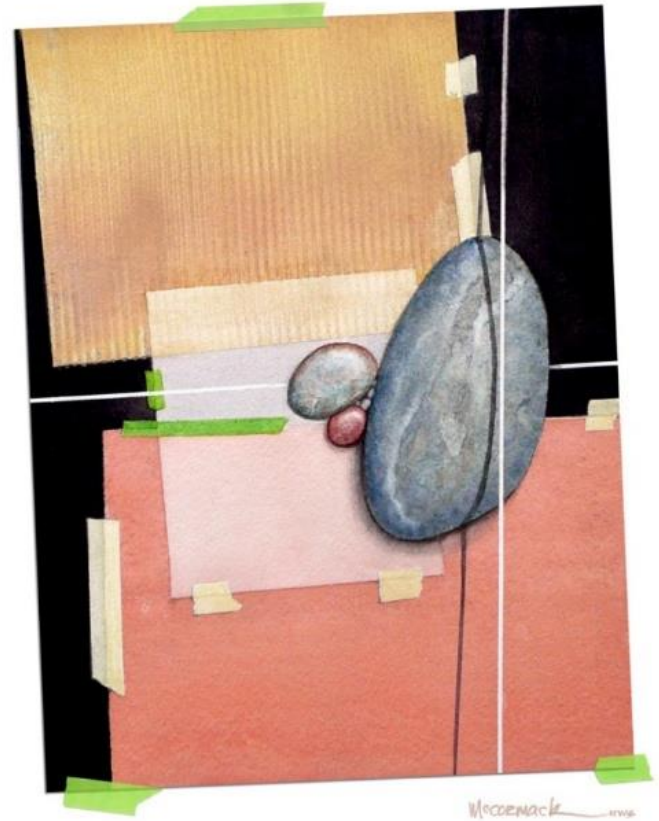
- Created a 5 year plan: worked in a series, developed a body of work
- Joined watercolor societies—attained signature memberships (a union card that opened the door to opportunities).
- Art school training made him highly competitive: do something fresh and present your best work.
- After reaching goals (getting into shows), he set NEW goals (winning awards)!

Influenced by Abstraction

Artist Lazlo Nagy



Rock Paper String + Tape
by Geoff McCormack



Breakthrough: Combining Techniques

Black Hole Theory by Geoff McCormack



Copyright Liz Walker, 2021

*If you want your work to get noticed,
make sure it “walks funny”.*

–Geoff McCormack

Geoff McCormack: How to Make Your Art Walk Funny

- Keep learning and growing as an artist
- Move your work forward: technically, philosophically, intellectually
- Do something that's different and uniquely you
- Don't try to be weird—just take something and say it in a way that it hasn't been said before

Influenced by Modern Masters

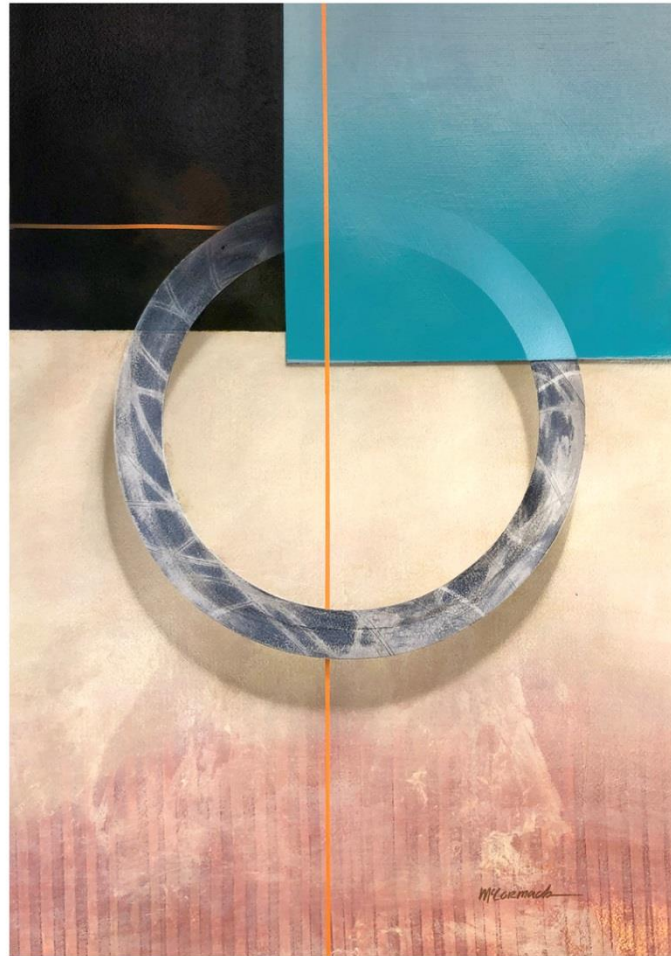
commentary on modern artifacts/pop art traditions

Robert Rauschenberg

Amazon Package From Robert
by Geoff McCormack



Series: Walking in My Own Shadow



Walking In My Own Shadow #15 by Geoff McCormack

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Geoff McCormack on His Painting Style

Geoff asks: “How come all my paintings look similar?”

His answer: Because I have developed **a visual vocabulary** and I use elements that carry over into other paintings.

It’s all part of creating a series, and a body of recognizable work.

Staying Motivated (Why Paint?)

- Art is a conversation between the viewer and the artist—how **do** you keep the dialogue going?
 - Are you scheduling time to paint each day?
 - Is your art getting seen by the public? (online/social media or in galleries)
 - Is your art getting vetted, examined, discussed by fellow artists whom you trust?
 - Are you attending critique groups via zoom? (pros and cons)

Juried Competition: Is It Right for You?*

The Quest for Show- Worthy (A-List) Paintings

*it's perfectly ok if it's not



Why Enter a Juried Show?

Some benefits:

- Recognition by jurors & peers
- Gain a wider viewing audience for your art
- Possible sales, awards, or future teaching opportunities
- Deadlines force you to produce more A-list work
- Keeps the ego in balance: an acceptance or award strengthens the ego, while rejections keep us from taking ourselves too seriously.

Tips for Creating Show-Worthy (A-List) Work

- Get my paintings vetted by trusted artists
- Learn to recognize when a piece is truly FINISHED (posting on social media can provide feedback)
- Keep a list of my best paintings (size, media, etc) and assign them to shows months before deadlines
- PAINT! Create enough paintings so that I have 20 show-worthy paintings to choose from each year
- The more work I produce, the better my odds of success

Tips for Creating Show-Worthy (A-List) Work

- Find out who is jurying, but don't paint to please or impress a juror
- READ THE PROSPECTUS CAREFULLY! Rules Matter!
- Keep track of acceptance and/or rejection rate; notice which jurors seem to “get” your work
- Work in a series and create variations on a theme; (repetition=style)
- Put your images in a folder on your PC and look at them in thumbnail view—which ones stand out?

Handling Rejection



The best way to get approval is to not need it.—Hugh Macleod

Always Look on the Bright Side

- Self-worth does not depend on being accepted into a show; accept rejection and move on. (It's only one juror's opinion!)
- Notice who else didn't make the cut; you're in good company!
- Celebrate artist friends who ARE on the list—and congratulate them on their accomplishment.

After The Show (Taking Stock)

- Study the show catalog (what did the juror select?)
- Find an artist in the show whose work you admire
 - track them via facebook, website, insta
 - invite them to teach a ZOOM workshop! (I've had several artists come to teach in Portland)

After The Show (Taking Stock)

- Did someone find a better way to say what I was trying to say?
- Could my painting be improved or modified?
- Or do I persist and enter it in another show with a different juror?
- Do I need more time to refine/define my art before I enter shows?

Honor Thy Painting

Present Your Work in Its Best Light

Wide Border (3.5" minimum)

Irregular Sized Painting With Wide Border



Don't Cut Corners on Quality

Details Matter: Clean Mats, No Overcuts, and No Plexi Scratches

Wide Border (3.5" minimum)



Thin Border (2.5")



Tracking and Assessing Your Progress

At the end of each year, I assess my progress and I write about:

- Workshops, instructors (what I learned from each)
- New methods/materials I've tried
- Art/artists who have influenced me or showed me how to solve a problem
- A “top ten” list of my own best works—and why they are important
- Shows I've entered (accepted or not) and awards received

What's The Takeaway?

(How To Aim for the Ceiling)

- Embrace your **influences**
- Put the “miles on the brush”: **PAINT!**
- Seek out honest feedback on your work
- Put **YOU** into your work; tell a story
- Create work that “walks funny”

After all is said and done, there is only THE WORK!
We are like Phil (played by Bill Murray) in the movie
“Groundhog Day” ...



The creative journey is not where you wake up in some mythical, happy, foreign land.

We have to wake up every day, like Phil, with more work to do.

--Austin Kleon