

Up close: She makes art, love intersect on paper

By Aimee Heckel Camera Staff Writer
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Maybe Gina Blickenstaff was born an artist. She doesn't remember the day she decided that was her life's passion; it simply always was.

The Boulder woman remembers standing over her father's shoulder as he painted book covers for Scholastic. She helped her mother create games, while sharing ideas from a common overflowing creativity.

Blickenstaff was the artist in grade school classes. She attended art college in Philadelphia. It was seamless that she continued painting when she moved to Boulder, where she has been a professional artist for more than 30 years. She's a staple on the Open Studios Tour. This year, she won Best of Show from the Artists Association of Northern Colorado.

This year, she also lost both her mother and her father, in the span of five months. The family torch is now hers to carry, and she is lighting it with love; that is the message and inspiration behind every one of her paintings, she says.



Gina Blickenstaff believes love can be expressed through the power, creativity and healing in hands, and she is exploring this theme in her art in a series titled "The Hands of God." (Cliff Grassmick/Daily Camera)

We were curious about the junction of art and

if you go

What: 100 Paintings for \$100 holiday sale

About: Boulder artist Gina Blickenstaff's annual sale of her original local landscapes

Where: Blickenstaff's studio, 3050 Baylor Drive, Boulder

When: Noon-5 p.m. Dec. 15

Info: ginablickenstaff.com, 303-494-4464

love -- and spirituality, another huge aspect of her work -- so we probed the creative depths of her mind to better understand.

What inspires you to paint?

I'm very turned on by expressions of love and especially the mother and child scene. Any expression of love is just enticing for me to try to depict in a painting.

We're living in very painful times. I think it's crucial now during all of this pain to try to keep our joy up as much as possible, because it's too easy to fall into fear and depression. When you

have beautiful paintings of people expressing love -- the beautiful things that people do in their relationships -- it's uplifting; it keeps that joy on the surface more. I consider that my responsibility, since I can depict that in art.

In addition, nature has always been a big healer for me. So that's why I'm doing all these landscapes now. I'm trying to show the beauty of life and give people a respite from the pain.

How does spirituality influence your art?

I was very spiritual at a young age, also. I started doing transcendental meditation when I was 15. When you link up with the soul in meditation, you receive energy from your soul, and the soul is all creative, all wise and loving. It's a method of bringing down that energy into your life. I consider that the reason I have become so creative in my work, the reason I focus on beauty and love in my paintings.

One of your art collections is called "The Hands of God." What is the story behind this series?

Broadly, this series is meant to be a depiction of the Hand of God, our one Father, working through the collective hands of all of humanity. More specifically, I convey this by the use of ordinary people engaged in ordinary tasks, but from a position of love, caring and intimacy, which is often overlooked in the busy-ness of our everyday lives.

I would like this "Hands of God" series to bring to the viewer's mind the following questions: What am I doing with my hands? What is the power that I have in my hands? Am I using my hands correctly for the betterment of humanity? Am I expressing love through the use of my hands?

My intention is to exhibit the series as a measure to inspire the widespread expression of love. I believe that, with current world condition as it is, humanity groans for beauty and the illustration of love.

What or who is God, to you?

I think of God as an energy: the energy of love and creation. Right now, I think that we are facing a great period of spiritual growth for humanity. ... It's called the externalization of the hierarchy, coinciding with the change in age that we're experiencing, which is causing all this stress. We're moving from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius. We're getting rid of the old separatist ways of doing things and making way for the time ahead, more focused on synthesis and brotherhood.

A lot of people have fear of losing the ways they're familiar with ... but it's a message of hope. It's ushering in a time of sharing, when we can get the starving millions fed, and deal with in a more open way the problems from greed and manipulation and the outrageous focus on materialistic lives.

And how does this tie in with your art?

To me, it's all about love. The point of my "Hands of God" series is to remind people how powerful their hands are in the expression of love.

It's a combination of trying to uplift people from the pain and also remind them the power that they have to be an agent of change in the world, which we sorely need. Because it's so unbalanced. It's so horrible, in a world of plenty, that we have millions of people starving every day. I feel like humanity will look back on this period as a dark age because we're so obsessed, in the developed world, with a materialistic focus.

How is this message important this time of year?

For Christians, coming up to the holiday season, people are thinking about love, the meaning of Christmas and getting more in touch with the aspect of themselves that keeps yearning to be one with their God, or the love aspect of themselves.

My goal is to put the focus on the things that really matter. ... The big SUV you're coveting, or the big TV, none of that matters if you don't have somebody to watch the TV with you. I'm painting relationships. The love relationship between people and animals, to me, that's where the meat of humanity is; not in the traveling, not in the things, not even in your life career that you think is so important.

Is that challenging to capture on paper?

I don't find that challenging at all. Artists always put some of themselves in their art. I have pretty good access to that level of emotion and beauty, and I'm sure I'm putting some of that energy into my work.

Do you think the intention of the artist matters when they're creating something?

I think you can go into a museum and stand in front of a Rembrandt painting and feel the very powerful energy emanating from his work.

I'm not anywhere as evolved as Rembrandt, but I think people feel this energy coming from my work. A lot of likeminded people are attracted to my work, which is interesting. They pick up my own love. They respond.

I actually believe that our thoughts, as well as our actions, wreak havoc on our environment. They help to create the disequilibrium that has caused the extreme weather patterns. The very atoms of nature are disturbed (and this has a detrimental effect on people, which sends some fragile types over the edge, like those who want to go into a movie theater and shoot everyone). So, in my view, we have more responsibility than we know -- and my "Hands of God" series is one attempt to contribute a more peaceful force.