

AN EASTERN EUROPEAN FLOURISHES IN SILICON VALLEY

by Dan Koon

Well, for all its problems, America can still be a land of opportunity, if you ask painter Anna Kurowska. Growing up in the small city of Ozorkow in central Poland, Anna did not have much hope of attending art school. It was expensive and, in post-Communist Poland, somewhat elitist. Anna says you can tell the students at the art schools simply by the way they dress, something you can't do in America where high tech tycoons can be found running their companies in jeans and sweatshirts.

Anna's mother worked in the fashion industry designing patterns for clothes, but as the single mother of two, living in an old home that required extensive renovation just to keep out the winter wind, an art



Anna Kurowska with Dreams III

school education did not seem in Anna's future. Though she loved art (drawing was her favorite class in school), the family thought she would follow her mother into the

fashion industry as a designer and following high school, she enrolled in a technical university in nearby Lodz with the hopes of getting the education she needed to follow





Dreams

her desire. Her experience there was somewhat of a disappointment as many classes merely prepared her for a mechanical job in the textile industry, not what Anna was looking for.

Saved by Cyberspace

Then one day in the late 1990s, Anna, having just discovered the Internet, logged on and went to a chat room. As fate would have it, she began a conversation with an expatriate Pole living in Silicon Valley. A year and a half of emailing back and forth led

Anna and a young software engineer named Adam to decide that Anna should come to visit America so they could at last meet face to face. Good led to better led to best, and in 2001 they were married. After moving to the U.S. for good, Anna was finally able to realize her life-long dream of attending art school.

Not having the green card that would allow her to work, Anna enrolled in Evergreen Community College in San Jose and to her delight found there were no restrictions on taking any art class her heart desired. There were no entrance requirements demanding that

she already know how to draw before taking a drawing class, as in Poland, no expensive tuition fees, no peer-group-required mode of dress.

Anna jumped in with both feet. Learning art by day and looking at art, courtesy of the Internet by night, Anna began to develop a foundation of technical skill and a vision of what she wanted to communicate.

Color, Color and More Color

Before the fall of Communism, American films portrayed Eastern Europe in the duller grays possible. But far from shameless propagandizing, Anna and her husband can vouch for their accuracy. "In Poland, everything was so gray," she says. "In school we had the ugliest uniforms. Colored pencils or pens were hard to locate in stores and expensive when you could find them, like many other goods. There was no color anywhere."

Even the television Anna and her family had was black and white. So, it's not an exaggeration that Anna had an epiphany when her mother hooked up their small color TV and Anna got her first glorious eyeful of Mickey Mouse in full color.

Fast forward to 2004 and Anna surfing around, looking at contemporary painters. She was inspired to begin expressing herself through paint, and looking at her paintings (www.fineartregistry.com/portfolio/Kurowska) one

clearly sees a dismissal of the dead grays of her childhood. And perhaps also the thick, blocky, lifeless figuration of what passed for aesthetics behind the Iron Curtain.

"I am mostly interested in abstract and non-objective work," Anna says in describing her work. "Those two styles of painting let me explore my interest in color and texture. They give me an opportunity to show a part of me and part of my past. It is also an urge of creating something not only meaningful but also beautiful in this so cruel and full of ugliness world. It is proved that colors influence our mood and that's why it is so important for me to use that knowledge in my work in order to create specific and intended feelings. Therefore, I focus so much on color. Of course, it does not mean that I only use 'happy' colors but I rather try to manipulate and use them consciously in order to create some positive emotions."

Traveling in Unknown Directions

I also love texture and endless possibilities that texture gives me," she continues. Working in acrylics, Anna has



Abyss

numerous media she can employ and enjoys experimenting with a wide variety including tissue paper, aluminum foil and newspaper, overlaying them with screen patterns, brushing them with combs and finding out everything these things will do when bent under her eye and hand.

"I think that it helps me set myself apart from other painters," she says. "It also helps me show my individual style and bring something new in my work. Creating texture gives me indescribable feeling while I am working. It lets me create something unexpected even



to me. It is like traveling in unknown directions."

Her fascination with the non-objective traces to an admiration of Kandinsky and Pollock. Anna professes to

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owe more to contemporary painters, unknown though they may be. She enjoys simply googling “contemporary abstract art” and letting the search results reveal what they may.

“In the past I didn’t understand the beauty of abstract and non-objective work. I think that I had to become more mature to appreciate those styles of art. I also have to admit that even now being in the world of abstract art, sometimes I want to rationalize it and understand it. But not understanding and simply appreciating and letting go of all expectations is the key to finding something interesting, meaningful, and beautiful in abstract and non-objective work.

“I would love my work to be read differently every time somebody looks at it. I want people to find in my work, something that is important to them not necessarily to me.”

Amidst Anna’s saturated colors and textures one often finds figures or figurative suggestions and this demarks the direction her painting is headed.

“In the future, I would love to move towards surreal work,” she explains. “I really love this style of art. There is something magical, special, emotional, unexpected, sometimes even weird, and very interesting that attracts me to this style. It makes me look longer and more carefully at surrealist paintings. It provokes many questions that are very difficult to answer but I find them to be worthy of looking for answers.

I also think that surreal work can be very demanding and difficult in reception, and therefore I am so fascinated by this style.”

And of her transition to living in a culture drastically foreign to her upbringing (school children in Poland learned Russian, not English, as a second language; that is changing now since the fall of Communism), Anna is



Dots

grateful for the power of visual means of expression.

“I think that art helps me communicate in this foreign country. And even though I would prefer people to not necessarily understand my ‘message’ and ‘language’ but rather discover themselves and their ‘messages’, their ‘languages’ in my work, art still remains universal and lets me create some kind of communication between myself and the viewer.”



Colors of Magic

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Emerging Artists and Fine Art Registry

Anna only recently discovered Fine Art Registry™, but for an artist who has previously sold her paintings to friends or on eBay, she has quickly grasped the benefits of having a permanent database of her art, no matter how far and wide her paintings one day travel. The FAR system of tagging each work of art virtually guarantees the provenance and authenticity of her works for all time. While that’s something an artist might not spend much time thinking about, collectors, galleries, museums, insurance companies and law enforcement certainly do. What’s to prevent a clever copyist learning the style of a Picasso or a Miro, a Dali or a Chagall, and passing off his works as that of one of these masters?

Right now FAR is following the story of Teri Horton and the ongoing furor surrounding her thrift store purchase some years ago of an alleged Jackson Pollock, a work which instead may have been done by a comparatively unknown, Frankie Brown. A verifiable and virtually counterfeit-proof system of tagging works of art would tip the scales in favor of the good guys as regards art market crime. Collectors certainly appreciate knowing that their investment is what it is claimed to be!

Beyond this, Anna finds much of interest on the FAR website. “I think that FAR is a wonderful place for artists,” she says, “and a place with a great future. It contains so much useful information and many, many articles and pieces that are fun to read. I am still at the beginning of discovering FAR but I am already in love

with this site. There are people, like Lynn, who are always ready to help us, artists. It gives me this wonderful feeling to know that there is somebody who really cares.”

And as an artist embarking on a successful painting career, Anna will tell you that it often requires only an opportunity. 



A Woman's Curves III