

Surviving a Sea of Tears

How an artist has turned tragedy to survival through her art.

Carolyn (Carri) Miles, Johns Island, South Carolina painter, had been involved in art in one way or another all her life. Born in 1963 in Connecticut, she painted as a kid and studied art in high school. Her first art showing was at the Scholastic Art Awards held at Gibbes Art Gallery in Charleston, South Carolina in 1980. She owned an illustration studio in Charlotte, NC in the mid to late '90s.

Then in 2000 multiple disasters struck. She lost her mother and husband and was herself diagnosed with cancer. "It was a traumatic and emotional period for me," says Carri, although she has gotten over this so well that you really wouldn't know it. "I started painting just as a therapy." In those days she painted all sorts of subjects but, among the paintings she did, were two that were particularly meaningful. The first one, 2001, was "Out of the Blue" which she has shown but never sold. "I usually paint fast and quick and like to finish a painting in a day, but this one took me about a month. It was a painting to purge myself of the traumatic experiences I had undergone and I spent a month on it and really did purge myself."



This painting was followed by another one that really began the current phase of Carri's artistic career, "Out of the Blue Too."



"This was still Out of the Blue," she explains, "But it was maybe a little on the lighter side of Out of the Blue. I really enjoyed it. It was the first of many, many mermaid paintings. What I felt like when I painted that first mermaid painting was that I had just cried a sea of tears and it seemed like I was drowning. I thought to myself at the time, 'What could survive this?' and the answer was in that painting. It was a magical thing: every time I painted a mermaid it sort of kept me floating," she says.

Recycled wood and polyurethane coatings

Around that time Carri stopped painting on canvas and went to acrylic on wood. But this was not just ordinary wood. She uses only recycled wood and this is a key factor for her. "Companies, friends, construction sites and so on donate the wood that has been scrapped," she explains. "It's had a life and someone's thrown it away and now I feel like I'm bringing it back. The fact that the wood is recycled is very important to me. I love cutting the wood. It's part of the whole process." She brings the wood home and cuts it with a jigsaw which allows a very free form approach. "I study the knots and the grain, the scars and the scratches and look for the hidden beauty in the wood. I cut and sand it but try not to cover up the history but include it in the finished painting."

Carri's paintings are large, typically 4' tall by one or two feet wide. She tries to finish a painting in a day and will produce and sell around 15 a month, 4 or 5 of which

will be commissioned pieces. The retail value of her paintings ranges between \$450 and \$1,200.

She applies the acrylic in thin washes that allow the grain of the wood to show through in places, becoming an integral part of the finished painting. Then she coats the finished painting with up to 5 coats of semi-gloss polyurethane, carefully sanding each coat before applying the next one.

“If you look out over the ocean or the water from a bridge you can just see the little pockets where the water kind of glistens,” says Carri about the poly coating. “The painting gets that same effect where the poly will get into the grain of the wood and make those little glistening water-like areas.” The effect of that and the wood grain coming through is not that visible in the photos on the Internet, but when her clients get their first painting they see it and they usually want more. One of her client/collectors has 14 of her paintings.

Carri used to go to shows and when she was in Charlotte she sold her work through restaurants, galleries and studios. The Internet has changed all of that and she sells almost entirely through Internet auctions (eBay, etc.) and commissions. As an antidote to the isolation of Internet based artistic living, however, she is a member of several professional artist internet groups including EMOEA (Electronic Museum Of Established Artists, www.emoea.com) which provides her with some human contact of a more face to face nature.

Factoring in FAR

Another artist, Lorna Wallace, saw her paintings on the Internet and got in touch with her and introduced her to the Fine Art Registry. “I thought at the time – and still do – that it’s a fantastic idea,” says Carri. “Because I do so many paintings it’s a wonderful way for me to catalog them for my collectors and even for myself. It’s a great way to keep track of them all without having to keep all kinds of forms and paperwork myself.”

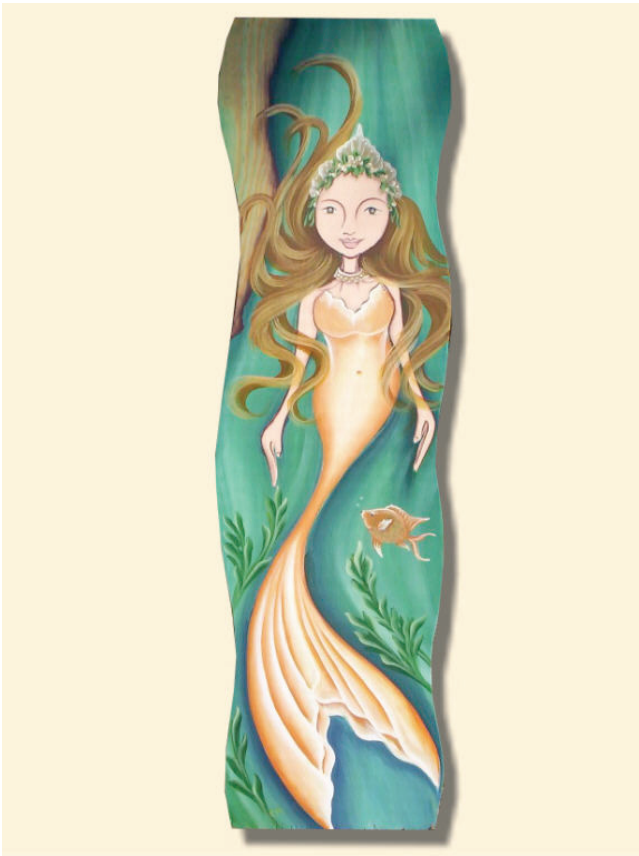
But that’s not the only advantage of having her paintings tagged and registered with FAR. “It helps me against any kind of forgery from other artists copying my work,” explains Carri. There have been several occasions when she has seen other artists copying her work and trying to sell it, usually through eBay. Because she has her work registered with FAR, usually a kind note with a referral to her online gallery at FAR is enough to get them to cease and desist. In the case where someone disagreed, the eBay Verified Rights Owner Program (VeRO) came to the rescue and

were able to look at Carri's FAR gallery and very quickly settle the matter in her favor.

"It's also very useful when I am doing commissions because I can give the customer a place to go to look at a very large body of my work."

Consequently Carri tags all the art work she sells. FAR is an integral part of the business side of her art, helping her organize, sell and maintain the integrity of her art out in the marketplace which, for her, is largely the Internet these days.





An artist all her life, Carri really has converted the tragedies of recent years into something constructive. She survived the sea of tears. She didn't drown. And the world is a more beautiful place because of her art.

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