

Floral Memories



Upon opening a book of poetry, something flutters from my hands. A withered moth, I think. As I pick through the pinkish fragments, I realize this is what's left of a prom corsage I wore 25 years ago. Long gone is its scent, yet I recall the roses' rapturous smell lifting my feet that night as my tuxedoed beau whirled me across the gymnasium floor.

Flowers evoke strong memories. They're sent when we're born, when we die, and on all the momentous occasions in between. Such memories are the inspiration behind many artists' work.

Though Patricia Nix claims her bold, contemporary paintings are more about color and shape than nostalgia, she realizes that the roots of her present work go back to childhood dreams and fantasies. "When I was 11 years old, my mother received a birthday card from my grandmother that had a single pink rose on the cover. I recall being enthralled by this picture and would stare at it for hours after school," says Nix, who then took her allowance and invested it all in a beginner set of oil paints and a canvas board. "I immediately came home and copied that pink rose with my new paints. This was my very first oil painting."

Images of flowers call to mind the special times of our lives.

By Debbie Hagen

"Sundance" is a new work by self-published artist Jeanne Barone, whose interest in flowers began with a home garden in her youth. Enter 303 on reader service card.

18 • art trends • june/july 1999



"Sunflower Basket," by self-published artist Laurie Korngaden, is one of many works that incorporate flowers from the artist's own garden. Enter 308 on reader service card.



Barbara Mock, whose "Hellebom Elegance" is published by Bentley House, was inspired to paint flowers by the many magnolias of her hometown. Enter 309 on reader service card.

Though she now lives in Georgia, Mock's thoughts and memories often go back to Guthrie. She says, "My grandma was a flower enthusiast. She didn't have any lawn. She dug up all the grass and put in flowers—lots of them." Continuing this legacy, Mock's passion for flowers comes alive in her paintings, published by Bentley House.

"I believe our awareness of color and flowers is related to our mothers," says watercolorist Connie Glowacki. "They're the ones who brought us up, and they're the ones who waited patiently for the crocus and peonies to bloom." Her latest release is "Last Rose of Summer."

"For artists, it's hard not to think of the gardens that you



"Wild Daisies" by self-published artist Susan Swartz, reflects her interest in fields and hillsides of flowers. Enter 310 on reader service card.

grew up with," Glowacki says. Perhaps, there's some nostalgia connected with that, trying to return to a slower-paced time when planting beautiful flowers and arranging them was the art of everyday living. Unfortunately, it's a tradition few people find time for today, she observes.

"There's an innocence to a flower," says Glowacki. "I guess it is because they're so short-lived. There is such sadness when the flowers wilt and they are gone. The bud, the blossom, and the beauty all exist in parallel to human life—except with a flower, it's shorter."

Jeanne Bonine says her favorite flower is the rose, which she believes is the ultimate symbol of life. The bud opens slowly, reaches its peak, and then withers. The petals fall one by one. Human life is like this, she says.

Bonine's earliest childhood memories go back to the gardens surrounding her home. "I grew up with my mom in a small house in St. Paul. We planted flowers and flowers and flowers," says the self-published artist. "We grew passion flowers, which seemed very exotic. We used to take the snapdragons and pinch the back of them so that their mouths opened and closed. I guess every kid does that," she laughs. "Then there were the hollyhocks. I have pictures of me with my mother standing before them. Looking at those now brings a major meltdown."

Floral memories are often connected with loved ones who are either distant or gone. All flowers remind Rose Gehrman of her husband and art teacher, Dale Gehrman. "He was teaching a class on painting white roses," says the Pacific Northwest watercolorist, describing one of their first meetings. "Everyone in the class knew that he was in love with me but me. In fact, he told someone else in the class that he was planning to marry me."

Once art class ended, the couple met twice for coffee, then knocked on the door of the justice of the peace. Soon, Rose and Dale shared an art studio, working side by side. Rose picked up every trick she could from Dale. Practically overnight, she refined her novice skills, bringing crisp realism and depth to her work. Today prints by Rose and Dale are available through Soulmates Publishing. "Every time I paint a flower, I think of him," Rose says of Dale, who died last June.

Like Gehrman, Phyllis Shipley thinks of her husband when



"Among the Lotus Blossoms" by Serena Rose, published by Emory & Rose Fine Art, reflects the artist's interest in exotic flowers and her view that nature is a gift to be celebrated. Enter 316 on reader service card.

paintings and prints of flowers. "I know someone who has high pressure, who tells me that just looking at one of my paintings makes her blood pressure come down. They evoke such a sense of peace," says Sharon Burkett Kaiser, whose impressionistic prints are published by Colville Publishing.

Though Kaiser paints landscapes too, her flowers have the most universal appeal. This causes the artist to remember a comment made by a college classmate: "You're great at painting portraits, but you'll never be a flower painter." She laughs. In fact, she doesn't consider herself a floral artist. If anything, she thinks of herself as a colorist, focusing on shape, value, and light. "My style is supposed to look free and easy," says the Malibu artist. "It's a huge compliment to me when someone comes by and says, 'Hey, even I can do that.'"

Another impressionistic floralist is Pascal, an 85-year-old sculptor and oil painter who studied under Parisian master Marcel Dyf. Like her teacher, Pascal is known for her brilliant colors, accentuated textures, pastoral scenes, and abundant flowers. "My favorite flowers are peonies, which I have painted numerous times. Their variance of color, their soft gracefulness, and fragrance always inspire me," says the artist, whose work is published by Liscot Enterprises. "When my daughter was born,



Rose Gehrman says that "Rhodes and Radiance," published by Soulmates Publishing, reminds her of the many hours she spent painting with her late husband. Enter 318 on reader service card.

"Endearment" by self-published artist Phyllis Shipley symbolizes her relationship with her husband of many years, who passed away earlier this year. Enter 317 on reader service card.



everyone knew my affinity towards peonies and filled my hospital room with them. It was like a garden in bloom with peonies of different colors, and their beauty added to the festive and celebratory occasion.

"The impression light makes on trees, flowers, and a hillside intrigues me," she adds. "I'm mesmerized by the varying shades a certain color takes on at different times of the day. Every color of the rainbow is witnessed in a single flower when seen in the right light. It's all about light. Light gives you dimension, color, and balance. When light dances across a tableau, freeing the colors within, it is truly beautiful." Just as Pascal and other artists see it, flowers are nature's poetry—perennially lyrical and always inspiring. ♦

Debbie Hagan is a freelance writer based in Andover, Massachusetts.