

SUSAN LIZOTTE

susanlizotte.com

A Los Angeles native, artist Susan Lizotte spent her early childhood in Bronxville, New York. Returning to Los Angeles in 1979, she attended Marlborough School and earned her B.A from UCLA. Influenced by the dynamism, beauty and fragility of her home city, her pieces are observational but undoubtedly philosophical. Her use of bold colours and unrestrained strokes give her pieces a life of their own. Tackling issues such as memory, loss and the destruction of the environment around her, Susan's work has been exhibited extensively around California. In our conversation with her, she talks about the profound impact of grief and loss, life in Los Angeles and her legacy.

In your body of work titled 'Los Angeles: I'm a Native', you include the recent forest fires which ravaged the state. How did this destruction change you personally as an artist?

The smoke and the smell of a wildfire in L.A announces it way before the news does. You see and smell the smoke, and it covers the city of Los Angeles when a fire is burning. Personally, I find it quite frightening. As an artist, I think the fire is beautiful and horrifying at the same time. Also as an artist, I find it very strange that the fires are normalised, it becomes merely another aspect of life in L.A. My "artistic" view of what is "normal" has made me more curious about investigating the differences between what is considered "normal" in Los Angeles versus other major metropolitan cities. For example, it would hardly be

considered normal to have fires in Manhattan.

If you had to pick one Italian artistic maestro that has influenced you personally, who would it be and why?

Leonardo Da Vinci would hands down be my Italian artistic maestro! I love seeing the infrared and ultraviolet scans of Leonardo's paintings and seeing how he worked on a painting. Seeing his creative choices and how he would change and edit his choices is entirely inspiring. It also shows me how he "saw" something and that each mark could move or switch to benefit the totality of the piece. It inspires patience and to always keep actively looking and looking.



Above: Los Angeles Wildfire, 12 x 12 inches, Oil on Canvas. Photo Credit: Alan Shaffer



Above: Hollywood Sign Wildfire, 30 x 48 inches, Oil on Canvas. Photo Credit: Alan Shaffer

Do you think the governments of the world will ever stop using its citizens as lab rats? Your body of work 'Mercury', touches on this and we would love to hear more. Honestly, I wish the governments would stop using citizens as lab rats. My series Mercury speaks to this and the abuse perpetually committed by those in power and with money. It seems like once people achieve a financial or social status, they must somehow feel that they have earned the (nonexistent) right to act entitled. This entitlement seems to confer the right to act with no morality and the right to break the rules. I think the abuse of power is an age-old problem which will never go entirely away. But we can assure ourselves that we will always fight for what is right and good. The future really depends on all of us.

What are the wonderful aspects of living in Los Angeles?

What a fun question! The light, weather and affordable rents make Los Angeles

particularly wonderful. The light in Los Angeles is golden, and daybreak is rather quick from sunrise to full daylight so the day just blooms and the low humidity makes the air feel very light on your skin. It usually doesn't rain very much in L.A, so it becomes a city of doing almost every alfresco which is fun. The low humidity means almost no mosquitos too, so it's pretty much bug-free.

The fact that the city is spread out allows lots of space available at low-cost rents which allows great experimentation in clothing design and the arts. One can find designers of all ages creating new clothing, new makeup, original artwork and all because the geography has room for everyone.

This isn't true in some other big cities where the rents are so high that the only clothing or art displayed has already been vetted and around for a while.

What is it about grief and loss that makes it so hard to process as emotions? How can art play a pivotal role in this?

I really don't know; grief is so excruciatingly hard. For me, trying to navigate grief and loss is painful and doesn't seem to matter whether the person who passed brought you joy or pain. Trying to allow the emotions unleashed by grief to wash over you, experience those feelings, and then to allow yourself to let go and release them seems to bring some introspection and ultimately peace.

The problematic part of experiencing grief through emotions for me is granting forgiveness, grasping that the things that happened are over and it is done. So to let go and put it in the past after you ride the waves of emotion is painful. Once you get to the point of thinking what have I learned from this person and this experience and absorbing that allows us to get stronger and wiser. For my art that was pivotal to use the loss and let the creativity take over. Painting the emotions and the ride was very cathartic for me. Even if people simply painted the colours they were feeling during their grief, I think it would help a lot of people.

What are you working on at the moment?

Right now I'm working on a new painting series all about Los Angeles, my native city. I'm having a blast painting my favourite places and things that make up Los Angeles. I'm painting my favourite bus stop in the city which happens to look like one could live there, it's a Spanish bungalow with a red tiled roof! And of course, I include the recent wildfires which every year terrify us.

Artists often talk about creating a legacy to leave behind, is this something you consciously focus on?

I have thought about my legacy since I

was very young, strangely enough. I think about it in more global terms though, not just about my artwork. I can only hope that whatever I'm doing, that I'm kind to others and thoughtful and helpful to others. To be remembered like that would be the best legacy of all. And if my paintings resonate with people in the future that would be a bonus!

What does Susan love doing when she is not in the studio?

When I'm not in my studio, I love spending time with my kids. My youngest son is still in high school, so I get to have lots of fun with him. I'm treasuring the time we have together because too soon they all will leave to have their adventures and it's fun to have them around now!

I also spend time with my pets; I have a pet peacock and two beautiful English Springer Spaniels. My peacock Pavi has been with me since he was a three-week-old peachick. He is gorgeous, comes when I call him, and he's very tame. My dogs are tremendous fun and silly and playful, just a joy to be around. END