

LOU BERMINGHAM/Artist

Moving Up Towards The Light

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The tragedy of interviewing talented and amazing people is you have more material than you have space to print. My exchange with painter Lou Bermingham was no exception. Here are some of my favorite bits.

HOW DID YOU START OFF IN ART? I was always drawing on everything from the time I could crawl. My mother was really supportive of the fact I wanted to draw and made sure I always had paper and colored pencils—so I'd stay off the walls. Then at about five a family friend, whose father had been a noted Swiss sculptor, noticed my obsession with drawing and bought me a set of oil paints and brushes. That set me off into painting. The first painting I ever did was of the devil, then I did one of Joan of Arc being burned at the stake, and one of Tarzan.

WHAT APPEALS TO YOU ABOUT ABSTRACT ART OVER REPRESENTATIONAL ART? I evolved into doing non-representational works. Before, I was working in a sort of post-modern surrealistic fashion.

Then things started to “float” around more in my paintings and I gradually began letting go and simplifying my imagery. I had been working with various symbols and shapes for years in my sketches and drawings—not ones I'd really studied, they were more like shapes I'd been repeating. These shapes and symbols started to glide into the work, and I would sort of obscure them until, more and more, they became layered as if Time had slid them into the underside of the “subconscious” of my pieces.

HOW DO YOU SEE TECHNOLOGY AFFECTING ART? There are all sorts of exciting things happening with technology—the SubZero Festival certainly works with that. For me, I think the internet is an amazing place to share and discover all sorts of different artists or art things that are happening globally.

YOU KNOW DIGITAL PRINTS? I mean they're pretty amazing, right? And that's not even new anymore. I really like Bill Viola's video work, and I think the

young artists are going to come up with even more amazing work. So I think technology is making all sorts of different art available to a much broader spectrum of people. For myself, I'm still such a tactile person. I really need the process of getting my hands on actual paper or canvas or wood...

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH CREATIVE RESISTANCE? Rain or shine, tired or energized, I show up at the studio after my day job [teaching art at Independence High School]. I set regular hours and work. Inspiration is a myth in terms of waiting for it to happen. The Muse only comes if you show up and work. Once in a while, she might hit you over the head with “inspiration.” My Aikido centering practice helps me get through tough spots which we all encounter.

WHAT TURNS YOU ON CREATIVELY? Walking down a street and looking at a beautiful leaf, a flower, the play of light on a color. Listening to my wife, Christy,



"The Muse only comes if you show up and work."

Lou Bermingham



sing a song. Looking at the ocean. The sound of a hummingbird. Sitting on top of the Great Pyramid. Looking at a cave painting 15,000-years-old. Looking at a Gauguin painting. Listening to John Lennon, Muddy Waters, Amy Winehouse—bless her troubled soul!

If you go back in time, then there's Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Bernini... ancient arts of Asia, Africa, and the ancient Maya, Inca, Mixtec. It's all inspirational to me. It charges me up.

DO YOU PAINT TO MUSIC, SILENCE, OR SOMETHING ELSE? I always listen to music. I listen to all sorts of different music: zydeco, soul, rhythm and blues, a little Bach or Satie, followed by Led Zeppelin,

followed by Lightnin' Hopkins, Charlie Parker, Coltrane, Chet Baker, and ending maybe with Frank Sinatra, Edith Piaf, Nina Simone, Aretha Franklin, and Stevie Wonder to chase it all down. I'm all over the map. And throw in some classical Arabic music followed by Robert Fripp of King Crimson, and REM for later.

WHAT ONE PLACE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE ONE OF YOUR PAINTINGS HUNG? In one of the caves in Lascaux in the Dordogne, France, next to a 15,000 year old cave painting of a horse or a bison.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ART COMES FROM PAIN? I'm in pain all the time, baby! Pass the bottle of wine. In all seriousness, yeah, you know pain makes you go through

things you wouldn't otherwise, but the stereotypical tortured artist image, we need to move beyond that. Little too much melodrama for my taste.

IN ART, IS THERE A PLACE THAT YOU ARE TRYING TO GET TO? IF SO, WHERE? I'm trying to get off on the top at the last stop of the elevator.

I'm moving up towards the Light, and down into the Earth, towards the Dark.

