
Too Much Simplicity

by George Sanders, Toronto MM

*Right: "Mes Aieux." Acrylic, 1990.
Painting by George Sanders.*



"Too much simplicity." This was a comment I read last year in the guest book at an exhibition of my paintings in Bracebridge, Ontario. I was amused, as I thought it a compliment rather than a criticism.

In my work I am more often able to achieve my Quaker values than I am in my daily life. In fact my values as an artist are what led me to feel at home with Friends. Life imitating art again. I try to approach my creative life with honesty and simplicity, and hope to experience a spiritual realization with my work. My work stands for me and my values, and when it is out of my huge storehouse it stands alone on its own without me to explain it or defend it.

Does one's life show in one's work or does one's spiritual growth show in the works created by any artist? I feel that if our pain were overt in our work it would be sentimental and not constructive. I have used my work for therapy and I am amazed at what has emerged. When my mother was dying I drew her several times and made paintings. I did not look at these for many years. When I did, I was overwhelmed by the strength that I had realized in these images of my mother.

It is interesting to hear what other people take away from a work even if it is "too much simplicity." I had a painting I had started 20 years earlier at the time of my divorce. I had stopped because the underpainting had seemed complete. I at last felt I should finish this painting. I felt this was a bright direct painting of a girl on a Canadian farm, a scene typical of my childhood. The judge in a jury show chose this painting to talk about the loneliness and pain in it. I was really amazed.

My photos often seem to me to be more successful at capturing the quality that I should like to have in my paintings, but like all artists I understand nothing about my own work.

Types & Shadows is published quarterly by the Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts. Subscriptions are available through membership in the FQA.

This page revised July 2001