

Roslyn Levin: for the love of Sumi-e



By Constance Scrafield

Window shoppers on Orangeville's Broadway will have an extra treat this month if they pause at Dragonfly Arts and take in the paintings by Roslyn Levin featured there.

Ms. Levin's art is the black ink painting of the Japanese Sumi-e, the challenge of which is to create the figure as simply, with as few lines, as possible. The great achievement is the idea of the painting being clear in just one line.

For the 12th year, the Orangeville artist is participating in the juried art sale at the McMichael Art Gallery, a fundraiser for its Education Program for the Docents who volunteer there.

Honoured and proud to be included in such a prestigious event, she was first invited by the selection jury, a group of some twenty people, and, thereafter by being one of the top 10 best selling artists in the event.

'It's the autumn Art Sale from October 20 to 22 - the Gala is on the 20th,' she told us. 'Fifty artists take over the bottom floor - 10 have three dimensional work and 40 are wall artists. All the work is for sale and the artist or representative has to be there all the time. Once a piece is sold, it has to be replaced with another. The gallery takes a commission on each sale as the fund raiser. Each piece has to be \$100 value or more.'

For more than 40 years, since she discovered her passion for this style of painting under the tutorage of Tomoko Kodami at the Ottawa School of Art, Ms. Levin has been excelling in more than one form of Japanese brush stroke. Recognition of her excellence has come in the many awards she has received from the foremost judges both here and in Japan.

Like a dedicated artist, she said, 'I'm constantly challenging myself. I bring stuff that's new - full colours even though true Sumi-e is 60 per cent black ink and usually my paintings are just that. I was working on a collection for a show in Alliston - Autumn Colours - and I've just done a painting with in-your-face- red and orange, which is not like me...'

Without feeling obligated to the Sumi-e stringency, Ms. Levin declared, 'I do whatever I want. I happen to like the black and white; even with my coloured paintings, there are large spaces of white. The viewer fills in the blanks in a way that uses the mind to help avoid dementia and Alzheimers. This is really more Japanese brush stroke [a broader style]. Usually, my coloured paintings are of flowers, butterflies -'

She commented, generally, 'I want to be painting. I love meeting people [in my space here at Dragonfly]. I want to hear what they feel about the work.

'Someone asked me, 'do you paint sloths?' and I said, yes. So, I did four or five others and people love them!'

She went on to talk about the challenges she has set for herself A couple years ago, it was horses. The Year of the Horse, she admitted to herself that she didn't know them and then started to draw them and draw them, going to where she watch them until 'now I can draw horses without looking at them - they are part of who I am now, part of what I can see in my mind.'

It is dogs next that she is learning. Ms. Levin had a terrifying incident with a dog attacking her as a child and she 'hasn't been friends with dogs' since then. Unlike horses and cats (which she has always drawn), dogs are also all different shapes.

'A person asked me if I do pugs and I said I would. It wasn't easy - their faces are a strange shape but I learned and the person was delighted. It has been so much fun seeing those reactions.'

Japanese calligraphy is a big part of Ms. Levin's portfolio. Considering always that Ms. Levin has no family connection to Japanese culture and art, her achievements in the work that she does is remarkable. Her calligraphy in particular speaks to the success of her

immersion into this world.

She once told us about that first class in Ottawa; "I took a class and felt I had come home."

For the eighth year running, this year, she won a first for her calligraphy submission "Wind Flower," meaning snowflake. The pieces are sent to Japan to be juried by five Calligraphy masters as tiny pieces of rice paper. The winning ones are mounted on silk scrolls. When she sent her first one, eight years ago, they created a special award for her as her submission was considered "better than gold."

Otherwise, she has been "juried" into the 49th International Juried Exhibit at the Papermill Gallery at the Todmorden Mills Gallery, Toronto, as has local photographer, Peter Dusek, from September 6 to September 17.

She asked us to remember, too, that she is teaching Sumi-e painting at Maggiolly's during September on two Sundays and two Mondays.

For all the details about her teaching and shows, check her website at Roslyn@artbyroslyn.on.ca