

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Breathing Life into Pain: Healing Through Art

Anna-Marie Lopez

I have painted since childhood and have been called a ghost because nothing of those early days remains. Now painting is an opportunity to illustrate my path. This passion drives me to work feverishly, flashes of memories acting as muses: doorways, pictures of me sitting in my uncle's lap watching him paint, my staring out of the psychiatric hospital's windows painting unseen worlds. What you see in my art is my interpretation and ongoing spiritual walks through darkness toward light. In my creative expression, I find sanctuary that permits pain a language; whether through color, bold line, marks of anger, dream-worlds, cruelty, or even love, a story unfolds in tongues never before allowed. I have been dissuaded from being myself as long as I can remember. My art censored for being disrespectful. Told to paint bluebonnets on lavatory seats or to stop wasting my time. This has only fertilized my fury to translate and give life to silence, to realize the moments that brought me here, in all colors, night and day, and to finally witness my own voice.

Surfacing from a violent series of suicide attempts and hospitalizations—the result of crippling depression—I turned my ravaged life around and began painting in my early twenties when I became inspired by an older, established artist who took me in after seeing my raw talent, mentoring and teaching me the artist's craft while fully encouraging me to consider painting as a career. The turbulent relationship both inspired and crushed me, as I continued to

incorporate my sometimes blunt, raw, and achingly disturbing portraits and dreamscapes.

Rendered in contrasting bright plumes of color and hard, dark lines, my work is at once a mirage of emotions vying for attention and the visualized heartache of abuse opening its richly decorated palm and bleeding onto canvas. While living in New York City, I worked by day in art stores learning my craft, honing a distinctive masculine style that incorporated muted dark images with bright bursts of light and edgy, distorted figures captured in unguarded moments. By night, I juggled the fickle music world where I managed several rock bands, exposing me to the underbelly of big city life and intoxicating my enthusiasm for passionate expression and the unheard voices of the city that profoundly affected my young life with their bloody life dramas.

Coming from the staid confines of Texas, I longed for acceptance and peace from inner turmoil. My work reflected this longing, as well as a gradual realization that I could not avoid my demons. However, I could depict them in the hollow faces and the splayed and flayed limbs of my starving images that picked grit from their steaming guts and lived through a web of suffering much as I had succeeded in doing.

New York expanded my circle of influence and allowed me to develop a style of my own, away from the constraints of what others perceived as Hispanic art, to include unapologetic perspectives on mental health and torment. Continually battling suicidal urges, the flirtations of manic episodes, and the fiery holes of depression, my life has been one of contrasts: pain interspersed with prolonged periods of extreme creativity and output. In my recent work, I realize a perspective that treats us to a realm of darkness and light, denial and exposure, pain and pleasure, and religious fervor.

Less afraid, less tongue-tied and shy, my expression demands attention, and it is at once artfully repulsive, beautiful, and shocking. My life—spent covering scars, assisting struggling artists, and observing American culture on the streets of New York—has constructed a universe of sensitive voyeurism, genderless anger, and a cocktail of highs and lows. These weave like a late-night song into the psyche, reminding us that as artists, we have no choice but to expose our lives, twitching on the vivisection table over-and-over again until the climaxing ache inside is assuaged. My influences, which are often oblique and risqué, range from my Sephardic heritage to travels in the media industry, and, most importantly, God, and my love of a distinct and pure form of Christianity that often butts heads with organized (and exclusionary) religion.

In my art, I explore my Latino roots, while simultaneously paying homage to the artists Alice Neel, Konstantine Bokov, Vincent Van Gogh, and Frida Kahlo. Inspired by them but not mimicking their flair for the extraordinary and the flamboyant, my art is imbued with a quiet terror, mirroring my life as well as that of the artists I was exposed to in New York.

Now, with my own studio, a body of work behind me, and my most beloved muse at my side, I find time for contemplation and self-examination. All lend my painting a greater breadth and sense of history and location, pouring darkness out into a cup light enough for reflection. Finding love later in life has breathed renewed energy into me, giving me the desire to leave imprints of my experiences. I am finding inspiration, not only in the aftermath of suffering and battles with depression, but also in the smiling irony of deepest love.

Cover by Anna-Marie Lopez, *Trees*, 2005. Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 20 in.
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