



Painting the invisible

Spirals of energy in Oak Bay artist's work

By KORINA MILLER
Photos by DON DENTON

Gaze upon one of Gillian Redwood's large, luminous paintings and you'll most likely find people. But don't be fooled. These are not portraits — Redwood paints what's invisible to the naked eye.

Redwood focuses her work more on what she feels than what she can see.

"What the mind creates for us to observe is very different from what is actually there," she explains, adding that her paintings aim to capture the energy between people and in their movements. "I paint energetic structure."

Redwood, who has studied Chinese holistic medicine and scientific theory of light and movement, notes that her understanding of science and molecular structures is so acute now, it guides her creative work.

"I'm fascinated by fractals and molecular structures and optics," she says, mischievously.

This isn't merely a flight of fancy. Redwood's paintings nearly vibrate with energy. It's almost like watching a play rather than seeing a still canvas. Movement and force parade across the surface in bold strokes, while energy flows in ribbons of colour, connecting one person to the next and to the world around them.

"I became interested in science because I understand that every object is full of molecules of energy. And I'm fascinated by the meridians of energy from Chinese medicine that's been understood for thousands of years. I'm aware of the knowledge behind it, but I also feel

it," explains Redwood. "I wanted to be able to paint those unseen forces and have a semitransparent aspect to the figures."

These forces are often portrayed on her canvases with vivid strokes of gold and red acrylic.

"I use colours that I feel are sympathetic to the feelings I want to express," she adds. "It's intuitive."

Describing her view of the world as holistic, she says, "I like to believe that our bodies are totally sufficient and self-healing because of these creative energy systems happening within us. I'm in line with Chinese medicine in that respect. I look at the complete energetic figure. Beyond the figure, we're connecting with universal energies as well."

Redwood shows these relationships between people and their environment with a spiralling effect. The spirals extend beyond the figures and often to other figures, showing people "connecting or having intention."

One of the most interesting examples of this connection can be seen in Lido, a large canvas that originated from sketches Redwood made of a woman on a beach in Italy. The spirals of energy and the bold, red lines stretch out to Redwood herself as she draws the woman, pulling the viewer into the energy of the painting.

The movement in her painting is heightened by the 3D quality of images that wrap around the sides of the canvas. Redwood paints the canvases flat before stretching them onto frames.

"From an angle, you see painting going around the side, which I like," she says.

Her inspiration comes from many avenues: "Sometimes I bring models together to dance or move or interact and then I draw them."

Other times it's less planned.

"Once, I was riding through Victoria on bus number 3. I was watching these young children interact. I had to do some very quick drawing. I had to come right back and paint."

The results are spirited, with lively cherub faces and golden light spiralling and cascading between them.

Redwood became a full-time artist in 2003.

"I was working in a management job, and I'm really a terrible manager," she laughs. "It wasn't working out. I was wanting to be creative. And so I just decided that if I was ever going to do it, I was going to do it now."

In reality, Redwood has been drawing and painting all her life.

"My dad gave me a set of pastels when I was seven. They inspired me. I still have a few left. When I finished school, I

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went to art school. Although I wasn't painting professionally, I was painting in the background. I was always painting.”

Her focus on energetic structure has taken root over the past decade and has pushed her forward with as much force as the energy in her paintings.

“Because my style is so different, I'm finding a lot of time I'm on my own with what I'm doing. For me, it's an exploring process.”

Nevertheless, she's found support in Oak Bay, where she's lived for the past two years.

“I really like the area,” she says. “It's beautiful and there are a lot of artists and creativity.”

Redwood also teaches at the Monterey Centre, which she feels is an excellent place for connecting with students and artists.

“People don't want to be isolated in their studios. It's important to get out there and meet and chat about your art.”

Redwood is also involved in Oak Bay's Gage Gallery Arts Collective, a group of 18 artists who came together a year and a half ago to share gallery space with a rotation of shows.

“It's an interesting development,” she says and it's impossible to miss the excitement in her voice. Gillian Redwood's own energy is easily felt, and it will be fascinating to watch as it continues to unfold across her canvases.

To experience more of Redwood's work, visit her website (www.gillianredwood.com) or see her upcoming solo exhibition at Gage Gallery from mid-June (www.gagegallery.ca; 2031 Oak Bay Avenue). 🐾



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