

In the Studio with Artist *Sherrie Lovler*



A dialogue with Amena Hajjar

Amena: Sherrie Lovler’s paintings reveal an elusive energy of a profound internal impulse. Trusting her process of writing poetry and deep contemplation, Sherrie masterfully combines language and imagery into calligraphic paintings. Using her tools as physical extensions to her body, she suggests Eastern and Western mysteries. Each painting holds its own story—an artist on a journey. Sherrie, a new member of GRO, shares her deep ritualistic processes and philosophy with us.

How do you begin painting?

Sherrie: I am a poet, and poetry has taught me how to paint. Initially, all of my paintings came from writing poetry first, and then that poem became a painting.

OK, let’s begin at the beginning. When you write a poem, what does that look like?

I am writing in my slopiest handwriting. No one can read it. I can barely read it, because I write very fast. Each poem is handwritten in one of my notebooks.

Twice a week, I wake up in the morning, get a cup of tea, and go back to bed. I invite the spirits of dead poets to sit with me; specifically, I invite them by name so I am not alone. I am tapping into a world that is beyond me and gaining some other wisdom. I also begin by reading from a spiritually oriented book. For years, I read Bill Plotkin’s *Nature and the Human Soul*. It took me four and a half years to get through it because it’s over 400 pages, and I read a short amount a day. Now I have been reading *An Almanac for the Soul*, by Marv and Nancy Hiles. A day-by-day almanac about nature, worldliness, and godliness: it’s a beautiful book I could read over and over for years to come, and continue to write different poems. I don’t write in a vacuum. I hope to invite some wisdom in and bring it back out in a different form.

How do you start painting from a poem?

When I enter a painting, I need something substantial. It might be a feeling that translates into the first mark. And in that, deciding where on the paper it should go.

I begin a painting with a sense of freedom. Not every mark necessarily makes it into the final painting. Knowing that I can crop out anything I don’t like on the page, or cover it with black gesso or gold leaf, keeps me in that state of flow.



Do you feel your paintings go beyond the initial poem?

Yes. My paintings stand alone now. And that was always the intention.

The painting does not need the poem to be complete, nor does the poem need the painting to be complete.

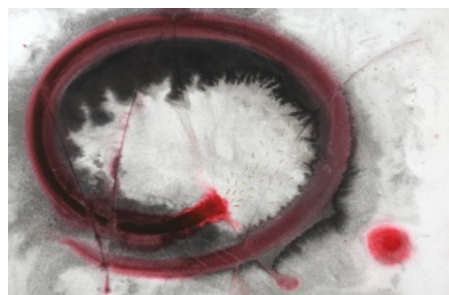
I still write poetry. Sometimes a painting will inspire a poem. And sometimes I come across a poem and see that it belongs with a painting I have already done. I see that as a homecoming. They find each other.

What has this process given you?

What has happened is that by working in two disciplines, both have gotten better. It’s like they support each other. That has been happening for the past 15 years. Both matured, separated, and yet came back. It’s a process that I am learning from and leaning into.

It sounds like your poems are invitations; are your paintings the same?

It’s a different process. I consider myself first as a painter; poetry is a tool, but it opened up a whole new world for me. What I learned from writing poetry is to let intuition come through. To not block that. So, if a thought comes to mind, I do it. I never question it. And that is what I learned: you just go ahead and do it. It’s been a training in intuition.



Are you aware of when your intuition came into your paintings?

Yes. The first painting I did that felt totally intuitive was a beautiful feeling. I remember it.

Now, I am painting the same way I write. These things are not given to me from somewhere else. I have to meet the “other” half-way. That is what I am doing with painting. I am meeting it.

Recently, I painted a piece titled “Spring Came”; Using my asemic writing technique with a squeeze tube of acrylic paint, a thought came. The paint was thick and raised, and something told me to use gold powder, which I have only used once before. It was like, ok, gold powder, and I shook it onto the wet acrylic, and it was wonderful —those kinds of moments when these thoughts come, who knows where they come from —that is my training. To let that happen. To be open to the process.

Where does your style and use of Eastern imagery come from?

When I was twelve years old, I came across a book at the library titled *The Importance of Living* by Lin Yutang, which explained the Chinese philosophy of holding inaction in equal esteem with action. Later, in high school, I took a graphic design class and learned calligraphy.

Having grown up in the Bronx, New York, and after receiving my degree in art from an upstate New York university, all I wanted was to witness a carrot growing in the dirt.

In my twenties, I became part of the “Back-to-the-Land” movement, inspired by the book *Living the Good Life: How to Live Simply and Sanely in a Troubled World* by Helen and Scott Nearing. While living on the land, we published a small magazine on homesteading skills. I hand-lettered the entire publication every other month. With that practice, I got really good at calligraphy.

Later, when my partner and I decided to leave upstate New York, we landed in Arizona. I had just attended my first calligraphy conference where I met a painter and master calligrapher from Arizona. I studied with him to learn to use letters as the subject of abstract paintings. After a few more moves, I ended up in Santa Rosa, where I worked with an artist who taught me her Chinese technique for dipping paper into ink watercolor to create landscapes. I worked with her for a couple of years. But when I started T’ai Chi, I fell in love with it; it’s like calligraphy in motion. When I paint, it’s not the fingers, the wrist, or the hand. It’s coming from the heart.

The painting and writing are how I live my life. It is all one, what I am drawn to, and I still am. That is what I continue to hold. How do I make my life my art? It is all intertwined: How I show up in the world, how I live, how I paint. It’s all connected.

To learn more about Sherrie and to see her work, visit:

<https://www.artandpoetry.com/>

