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A Conversation with Pamela Mooney Arc Studio #204

By Sherri Cornett



As we near a year of the pandemic chaos, confusion and grief in our world, Pamela Mooney's paintings – their softness, the often muted and pastel color choices and, in her portraits, the demeanors of her subjects – draw me in and away from those outside or personal experiences.

Sherri Cornett: Pamela, I often imagine portrait artists as keen observers of human nature and that leads me to wonder what leads them to be so considering of their subjects . . .

Pamela Mooney: Initially, it is a way to come to terms with the mystery of knowing another person. Through the process of painting, I am intrigued by each figure's expressiveness and ambiguities.

SC: Has there been something – a conversation, or an event – which has been particularly influential to your focus on portraiture?

PM: When I was in second grade my parents had a local painter paint a portrait of me from one of my school photos. At one point, the artist asked me to come to her studio for a sitting to complete the final touches. I often think about this as opening up the idea that painting could be something I could do when I grew up . . . especially since the artist was a woman and being a woman artist was unusual when I was a second grader growing up in suburban Southern California!

SC: Are those softer colors prevalent in your paintings indicative of your mood or outlook?

PM: Usually, I start painting with a specific color scheme in mind, but, often, the colors change as the painting progresses. I get inspiration from listening to artists talking about their works, reading interviews and looking at a lot of images – many on Instagram. By doing this, if I am feeling stuck, especially during this pandemic, or the painting seems to be going in a direction I don't like, I can get re-energized and approach the painting with a new perspective.

SC: On your website, I see you earned a degree in philosophy. Have those studies had an influence on your art, your motivation to do art, the way you look at art?

PM: Now that you ask that question, it makes me think that, yes, there does seem to be a connection between my studies in philosophy and my painting. When I was in college, I was interested in questions like "Who are we?" and "What are we doing?" and "How can we know something?" These questions also are in the background when I am painting. I think this comes into play especially when viewing portrait paintings. I am always wondering "Who is this person?" and "What were they like?"

SC: I see you have also done some still lifes this year – mostly flowers, but also one of delicate squash and one of a tube of lipstick and nail polish . Tell me more about what motivates you to do those.

PM: During the pandemic I found that I wanted to paint something really peaceful and relaxing and stable, so I started doing flower paintings and other objects to mix it up a bit!

SC: A lot of our readers are interested in how artists are coping with the pandemic. Have you figured out new ways to work? to stay motivated? to stay connected?

PM: Since my studio was in my home, it became very easy not to go anywhere. But, finally, I decided I needed a change, so I moved my studio to Arc, which was a great decision! It has been a joy to come here to paint and see what other artists are doing and see the work in the galleries downstairs. Such a big positive change for me! And, it has distracted me somewhat from all the stress and anxiety which surrounds our global situation right now.

Pamela's website <http://pmlamooney.com/>

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