



The Architecture of the Afterlife: Watercolor Collage

Artist: Antoinette Odette Prince, MFA
 Courtesy of the Vernon Street Studios
 Somerville, Massachusetts

Part Native American, artist Antoinette Prince endeavors to meld her heritage and formal training with an appreciation for the spiritual aspects of primitive art as typified by the tomb and sarcophagus paintings of ancient Mediterranean cultures, most notably the Greeks and Egyptians.

Objects in Egyptian tomb paintings were created for the tomb owner to be utilized in the afterlife. They were not meant to be considered as representations of objects but, rather, as the objects themselves. That sort of literality is also one of the most powerful aspects of Egyptian mythology.

Ms. Prince seeks to invest her work with that powerful simplicity by recovering visions of a timeless region of blue waters, black space and the eternal movement between the two.

Egyptian and Greek tomb and sarcophagus paintings have always held a deep fascination for me. I have spent many hours in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts studying the images and inscriptions on tomb walls, on vases and other objects found alongside the remains of both nobles and common people who lived in these ancient lands.

Central to my interest, and I believe to the last fascination that these objects hold for most of us, is the creator's and owner's belief in their special value. While it is clear that there are many individuals in our time who place a very high value on certain artist's work, that value is almost entirely seen in terms of currency—dollars, yen and marks. For the ancient Egyptians, the artwork that adorned their tombs was literally priceless, for it was to magically provide them with the tools to make the transition from the temporal to the eternal.

Therein lies my goal as an artist: to make the magic of the everyday. My Native American heritage reminds me of a time when life itself was sacred; a time when work, play, and worship were not altogether separate endeavors.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The process for me is not a process at all, but it is intuitive and inspirational. I search within and use images from my Native American heritage.

Once I have that image in mind, I make extensive use of the wet watercolor surface to allow for spontaneous explosions and interactions of color.

I paint quickly, using large sheets (22" x 30") of either Arches or Fabriano 90 or 140 pound cold-pressed paper.

I allow the first series of colors that drop onto the wet sur-

face to guide the choice of colors that follow. When satisfied with the series of colors that have accumulated, I begin drawing into the wet watercolors with multi-colored crayons and pastels.

After these watercolors have dried, I place them on a plexi-glass backing and, once again, search for the elements within the colors that best exemplify my vision. This often takes hours.

The intent now is to cut the work into specific shapes: I think a great deal about colors and marks on the surface, about quiet and loud passages, and about the movement generated by the layers of color.

I then make assemblage pieces accordingly.

Working intuitively, I place pieces against a white background, often experimenting with their orientation until I am satisfied. I then glue the piece to another large piece of paper, and adhere it to the paper with an acrylic adhesive. Weights are applied for 15 to 20 min to promote proper adhesion, after which I draw the painting using a calligraphic hand. Once again, I work intuitively, spontaneously, allowing shapes and symbols to leap directly out of my 'superconsciousness'.

RESULTS

The piece illustrated here is a 15" x 22" watercolor collage. There are usually four distinct elements in these pieces—watercolors, excised shapes, paper backing and calligraphic marks. The finished piece may be anywhere from 15" x 22" to 22" x 30". They are often un-named, though at times the clarity of the original vision comes through and they are named for that vision.