



ZEN SEKAI GALLERY

MY NEIGHBORHOOD:

Paintings
by
Sue Perry

June 24 - August 26,
2021



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An important exhibition of paintings by Sue Perry,
documenting the transformation of the neighborhood that she
has lived in for over 32 years.



Introduction

I first met Sue Perry when she signed on to plein air classes that I was teaching through Gage Academy of Art, or the Academy For Realist Art as it was then called. We would meet at the Washington Park Arboretum, Bob Pepper's Farm on the Snoqualmie River, or above the cliffs at Discovery Park. When the Academy and I parted company over pedagogical differences, Sue Perry polled the 15 students that had signed up for classes and suggested that I continue teaching privately, which I did.

After Sue had enough of plein air she continued to request regular critiques, and so I have had the pleasure and good fortune of observing her art evolve over the nearly 25 years that I have known her. I became friends with her late husband John, and enjoyed their company on my only visit to Paris in 2000. We visited the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay and climbed nearly to the top of the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris, despite my own discomfort with heights.

The best word that I can offer to describe Sue's approach to painting is dogged. I apologize if it seems pejorative, for I do not intend it so. When Sue winds up down a one-way cul-de-sac and at a total loss to find her breadcrumbs, she continues on. Her paintings, like most great art, reveal not just the result of her inspired efforts, but also the evidence of the struggle that brought her there. Her paintings are littered with the faint evidence of false starts and pentimenti, of a final victory after so many brutal battles. They do not exhibit the soft and inconsequential beauty of a confectioner; her truths are often bitter and hard to swallow, which is why their rewards are so much richer and long lasting.

The current body of work owes a certain debt to changes in minimum density requirements in key Seattle residential areas that began in 2012, and the Housing Affordability and Livability Agenda (HALA) proposed by former Mayor Ed Murray in 2015. The result has not made Seattle more affordable; it is one of the most expensive cities in the country. It has however incentivized the teardown of beautiful old neighborhoods and their replacement with multi-story, multi-family, and multi-ugly balloon construction housing units, along with the collateral damage of displaced native populations, and the disenfranchisement, dispossession and homelessness that accompany such grand schemes.

I'm not sure if Sue's initial interest in painting her neighborhood, on the edge of the historic Central District, was anything more than just a wish to celebrate its humble familiarity. But with the transformative destruction that came with HALA, it must have quickly devolved into a desperate attempt to salvage memory and mediate loss. And so we now confront these 34 paintings, embedded with sadness and joy, seeing that beloved familiarity fade forever, from places of dwelling, from once sturdy trees and haunted street corners. Ultimately Sue Perry's paintings provide a sort of reconciliation where almost none is possible, a record of fragile aspirations run asunder, yet impossibly shored up by the painter's art.

William E. Elston, 2021



ZEN SEKAI GALLERY

My Neighborhood: Artist's Statement



MY NEIGHBORHOOD

At 86, with thirty-two years on Seattle's 16th Ave, I've stayed put for a long time, longer than anywhere else, not any of the six states where I've registered for driver's licenses, nor any of the three foreign countries where I spent, all told, more than half a dozen years.

When I first arrived here, a lifetime resident told me, "They're ruining Seattle!" In fact, a group promoting "Lesser Seattle," a sort of anti-chamber of commerce, was getting a lot of press.

But this was where my daughter had found a place for me and my husband, John Perry, in the city where she has mostly lived since she left New York State for the UW at age 16. She assured us that the housing market was poised to take off and that this was a good investment.

So it was that John and I acquired a former mansion that had been converted to a 4-unit apartment building in Seattle's Central District, a part of town which grew up around Providence (now Swedish) Hospital, Seattle U, Temple De Hirsch and the Immaculate Conception Church: pioneering institutions established for people who worked or lived on the waterfront and up the steady hill leading away from it. When we came, the CD had already undergone extensive change. Its character reflected evolutions here and elsewhere: most important, perhaps, a national highway that cut it off from downtown, then the red-lining of what became a Black ghetto. Meanwhile, of course, there were the fortunes and misfortunes of a certain manufacturer of airplanes. In 1989, it was about to undergo still more change as the city sprouted a couple of other demanding corporate enterprises that continue to offer attractive job markets while manipulating tax structures with little regard for residents or workers, significant numbers of whom currently wander Seattle streets looking for places to pitch tents.

Thirty years ago, the CD was a slowly gentrifying neighborhood. We found ourselves complicit in an emptying-out of low income and, especially, Black neighbors retreating south for less expensive housing. It was not an easy place for anyone: gunshots punctuated the night. Our bedroom window still has a bullet-hole. Drug busts and murders happened next door. And the needy state of our long-neglected habitation was clear. Repairpeople on ladders lost tools left on the ground, carried off on stolen bicycles. Fortunately, our family includes two gifted carpenters willing to work under such conditions. John and I were able to support their endeavors since he had retired, and I somehow let the time slide by which could have been used to obtain local licensing to continue my erstwhile social work career.

Besides: I found myself painting! I'd spent a recent year in India where I had full-time household help on the campus of Hindu College in Delhi. Left alone to housesit, my



enterprising brother sawed a hole in the living room ceiling of our unit et voila: studio space! Canvases covered with Hindu gods and Delhi motor scooters began to appear. As time went on, there was a chance to go to Paris for a year and I learned to travel with rolled canvas and boxes marked “artists’ colors.” That year evolved into an annual habit of finding housesitters to manage the property while we absented ourselves for two months each fall. The result was a great many European paintings begun in Paris and completed in Seattle with “source materials”—photos & sketches—gathered in Paris.

English majors don’t know Venetian red from cadmium red. I needed help. As it happened, our arrival in Seattle coincided with the coming of the Academy of Realist Art—where I met two teachers who have remained an important part of my life. Both lived, at that time, downtown in Pioneer Square: territory where high rents have long since driven away artists and gallery owners. Bill Elston, a figurative painter whose landscapes are composed en plein air, is in Snohomish, territory that continues to inspire his remarkable work. Charles Emerson, a painter of “unfenced distances” whose specialty is color, continues to teach at what is now Gage Academy. I am grateful to both these remarkable painters, whose critiques have long given me a useful mix of pleasure and pain.

For several years John (a book alongside to amuse himself while I worked) drove me to various outdoor locations where I met Bill and other students and learned some of the elements of landscape painting. As time went on and we became less able to traverse uneven ground, this was no longer possible. In the end, however, it may have been the color green which accounts for my decision to become a studio painter: that difficult chroma defeated my struggles to make it dance as it does in Bill’s work. As for abstraction, thanks to Charles, I now see it in all painting—even though my commitment to figurative work remains irreversible. Forsaking the “representational,” the “real,” seems a diminishment of the possibilities of painting . . . Yet “narrative” narrows, sometimes with disastrous effects: who reads yesterday’s news? This creates a possibly impossible challenge especially for a painter whose concern with politics won’t go away, one whose studio work depends on her walks on the sidewalks of her world.

So why paint?

Maybe the question should be Why not? (Plenty of answers there: expensive, messy habit which soon exhausts available wall space . . .)

To pay the rent? Then don’t bother with paint: consult your local con artist. Or join the “artistic” cryptocurrencies, those speculations on “value” available at New York auction houses and art dealers. Or cover hotel walls with paintings that say “have a good sleep.”

To say something? Here the answer is, “I told you before, Junior: use words!!”



For “art’s sake?” Don’t knock it. Fictions help us live.

An innate urge to create, the human “will to power” that humans project onto deities?
My own “fatal eccentricity” that leads to these “clods of color?”

Such thoughts engender enigmas: “There be dragons,” or so say guys from Plato to Wittgenstein.

How about “pleasure?” Alas, this painter finds the application of paint resembles work. Satisfaction derived from the exercise of anything like talent is denied her. Some creatures enjoy running, doing what comes naturally to excellent legs. Others stumble forth on the legs they have.

There is, however, for this painter, pleasure in “dwelling,” meditating on whatever’s out there, doing her best to take it in, to use her eyes for more than avoiding trees, for, in fact, studying trees, deliberately entangling herself in their intricate patterns . . .

The result has been that after the move to Seattle the painter has accumulated a large collection of canvases she is strangely reluctant to part with. After the peripatetic global adventures described above, she turned to her neighborhood, picking up momentum as the attractions of the exotic gave way to a new enchantment: the ordinary. The less she traveled, the more she discovered new love for her immediate surroundings and their infinite possibilities.

What about the painful changes that her images inevitably include? The uneasy cohabitation of wealth and want in Seattle? The sadnesses encountered on sidewalks? Did Cassandra save Troy? Is political art an oxymoron without Goya’s brush? Did even Goya’s brush prevent war? Yet the clods of color continue to emerge out of aging tubes . . .

Because, of course, it is a kind of love that drives my painting, an effort to hold on to what was and keep it present in what is. Even when my brush finds an elegy rather than an ode, I live among remembrances of things past: such tender feelings as are generated by the play of light on the living room ceiling: the miracles “in living as and where we are.”

(Thank you, Wallace Stevens for this last lifted line—and others, including many of the titles of the works on display.)

Sue Perry, Seattle, 2021



ZEN SEKAI GALLERY

My Neighborhood: The Paintings



SUE PERRY

Metaphysical Streets, 2019

32 x 35 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Madness Of Space, 2018

33 x 38 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas

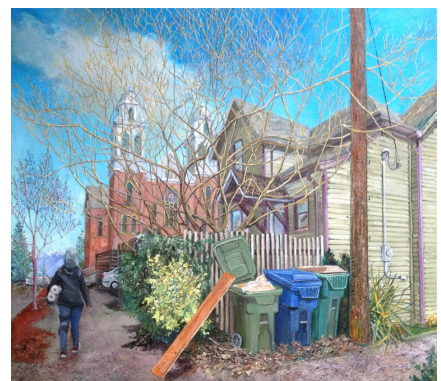


SUE PERRY

Immaculate Interpreters, 2018

32 x 36 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





SUE PERRY

Purple Couch, 2013

32 x 38 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

The Intelligence Of Trees, 2018

32 x 42 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Wrecked Angles, 2012

30 x 32 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





SUE PERRY

Red Couch, 2013

28 x 40 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Where Phantoms Feast, 2013–21

37 x 37 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Marchers, 2020

35 x 28 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





SUE PERRY

Say Can You See, 2019

35 x 42 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas

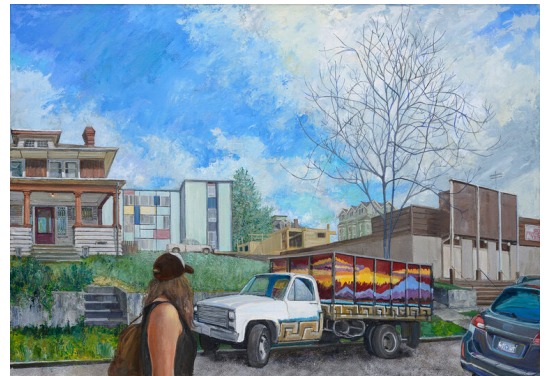


SUE PERRY

Rolling Sunset On 16th Ave, 2015-21

30 x 42 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas

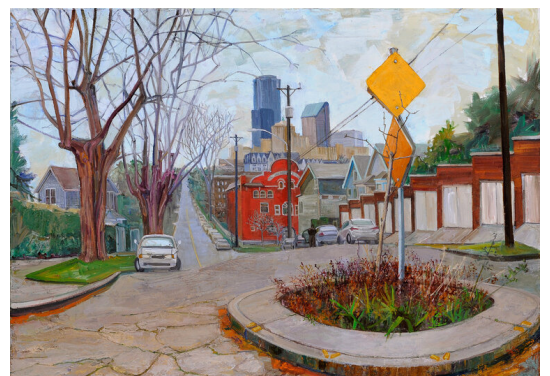


SUE PERRY

Traffic Cookie, 2012

28 x 40 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





SUE PERRY

A Thing Apart, 2015

36 x 38 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Demolition Man, 2018

36 x 42 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Café Dur, 2013

30 x 36 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





SUE PERRY

Transport, 2019

34 x 38 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Mortal Taste, 2019

40 x 34 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Ideas Of Order On Marion Street, 2019

33 x 38 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





SUE PERRY

Heritage, 2013

36 x 35 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

What Was Where It Used To Be, 2015

32 x 44 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Power Struggle, 2019

32 x 42 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





SUE PERRY

Immaculate Limo, 2015

34 x 38 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Green Apogee, 2015

32 x 38 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Sisyphus Screwed, 2019

42 x 45 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





SUE PERRY

Lighthouse Gospel, 2012

28 x 38 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on panel



SUE PERRY

Gallerie d'Allée, 2018

32 x 40 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Goddess Of Time, 2017

38 x 44 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





SUE PERRY

Man Carrying Thing, 2016

32 x 48 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

The Queen Of Fact, 2017

30 x 48 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas

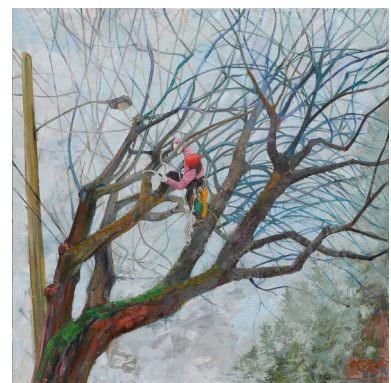


SUE PERRY

Trimming, 2012

34 x 34 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on panel





SUE PERRY

No. 2 Bus, 2015

32 x 42 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

Congregation, 2015

32 x 45 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas



SUE PERRY

No Way Home, 2015

28 x 36 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





ZEN SEKAI GALLERY

SUE PERRY

Fulfillment Center, 2021

32 x 38 x 2 inch (h x w x d)

Oil on canvas





“To dwell means to belong to a given place.”

Christian Norberg-Schulz



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