



Ensemble for These (Summer) Times: Summertime 2020 Interview Series

Interview with Artist Corinne Whitaker

E4TT: Many of our listeners are unfamiliar with the world of digital art. Can you briefly tell us a bit about yourself and your journey as an artist?

CW: Digital Art got its beginning in the 1970's when NASA brought back black and white photos from the moon. This was the first time earthlings realized that we were a mere speck in a greater universe. The radical implications of this discovery cannot be minimized: until then we thought we were the center of the cosmos. In our pre-digital view, humanity was the focal point of knowledge and experience: everything began with us.

Instead, the greater universe barely knew we existed. In 1994, Carl Sagan made an important video called "The Pale Blue Dot," reflecting where we stood in the cosmic view of things.

NASA posted those early photographs on the inside of a giant sphere, so that their engineers could walk into it and experience first-hand how our understanding had suddenly shifted. Renaissance perspective, which had dominated visual thinking for centuries, suddenly had a new companion, and artists had a new path to knowledge. Some of us realized that a new vocabulary was needed to reflect this radical change, a new iconography of vision. That has been my focus, and my obsession, for over 42 years. Additionally, scientists at JPL (Jet Propulsion Laboratory) colored those images, which raised questions for me about what is color. Does it look different in space from here on earth? Do scientists "see" color differently from artists? That exhibit, held at Cal Tech in Pasadena, strongly affected me.



E4TT: How did you come up with the name of your website, The Digital Giraffe?

CW: In 1994, I opened a gallery in Carmel, California showing my digital paintings and sculpture. I needed a catchy name, and The Digital Giraffe is what came to mind. I can tell you in hindsight why that makes sense: giraffes are peace-loving, vegetarian, stand taller and see farther than other creatures, have a huge heart. At the time, it was an instinctual choice. It became my professional identity from then on. It was also a working experiment: I was creating art as I was exhibiting it. I thought it might be problematic to do both in front of the public. Instead it was tremendously fulfilling. Visitors from all over the world came to talk and see. Children immediately understood, and carefully explained to their parents what was happening in art.



“Pain” (www.digitalgiraffe.com COVID cover image #2) ©Corinne Whitaker



E4TT: Your website currently features a presentation about what it feels like living in a global pandemic, which is a fabulous, meaningful artistic response. Could you tell us a little bit about your process for this? How do you determine the image you will post each day? Has it changed for you since you began this initiative, now that you're 3 1/2 months and over 120 images in?

CW: Roughly 4 months ago I realized that we were inundated with data, restrictions, technical info, about COVID-19, but no one seemed to acknowledge how it felt to live through this. We are not comfortable, as a society, expressing difficult emotions. Even though the Digital Giraffe had been a monthly eZine for some 26 years, I decided to exhibit a new image every day based on how we as humans felt as we lived through this pandemic. I mistakenly thought it would last a couple of weeks. Instead we are now into 4+ months. It turned out to be a huge undertaking.

Basically I had to review over 40 years of image-making. I did not change any of the images, nor did I change the names they were originally given. They had to be accessed, selected, resized, recorded, archived, uploaded daily, made available after the single day that they were shown. What amazes me is the narrative quality of much of this work. It is as though an artist's sensibility was in touch with a potential event of huge impact even before I was aware of it.

E4TT: What are you finding most artistically fulfilling in these times?

I feel blessed to be living at this moment in time. We are a species in transformation, as we move from carbon-based to other-than. Living forms are being grown on inert substrates; surgeons and scientists are transplanting parts from other animals into our bodies. Artificial Intelligence



is radically altering how we see ourselves and each other. We are on a historical journey, without knowing where or how it will end. I have sometimes called us the *Newanderthals*, at other times the *Quasis*. Even researchers at the forefront of experimentation admit to qualms about where this is all leading. As a species, we are the great innovators. We are also hugely destructive. We seem to be addicted to violence, to warfare, to unimaginable hatred. What other species has put its own kind into ovens, like those at Dachau?

E4TT: As a multidisciplinary artist, how does your work in each medium inform the others?

CW: I have often been asked if the images used in my books are illustrations? In the usual sense, no. They do not refer specifically to any line or page. On the other hand, their location in the book is carefully chosen. And they all, like the artwork itself, reflect the heart and mind of a particular artist at this time, in this place. Together they form a picture of who I am and what I am thinking/feeling. All art is autobiographical in some sense. We may not always have the key to deciphering it. If the work is compelling, it may in fact take years to understand fully. It helps to remember that Photography as a fine art took 150 years to be accepted.

I should add that I have always been passionately curious about tomorrow and the unknown. Where will it take us? What mysteries will we uncover? I can remember going through the birth canal with great anticipation: what's going on out there in the big world? And excitement: let me out of here! Don't restrain me. This is the spirit that fills my life to this day. I love experimenting with new materials and new processes. This is why I began, some three years, composing music using A.I., artificial intelligence. It is what has prompted me, over the years, to try new materials, like mirrors and brass, for digital painting. It is why my newest body of work starts with a

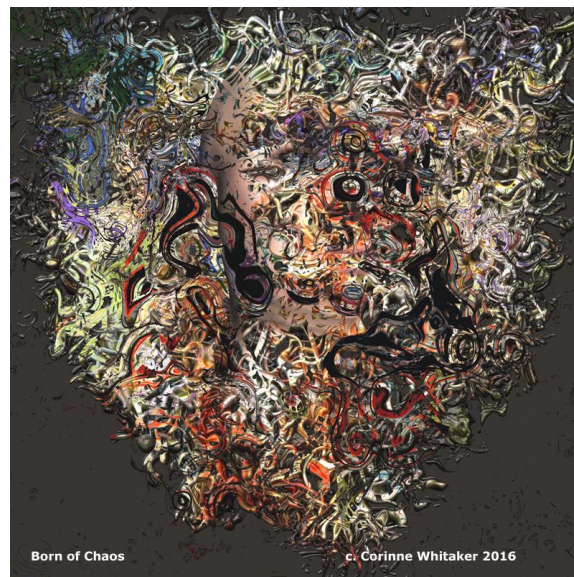
raw selfie, projects it into A. I., alters it digitally...just to see where it will go. I have often been asked how long I will continue using the computer to create? I answer, as long as the magic continues, and the magic never stops.

E4TT: Ensemble for These Times was honored to use some of your fascinating images for our "Film Noir Project" and E4TT soprano and the cover of Artistic Executive Director Nanette McGuinness' first CD, "Fabulous Femmes," also features your art. What is it like collaborating with your own daughter on artistic projects?

CW: Collaborating with my daughter has been a joy. Nanette is highly professional, engrossed in the world of art, open to new endeavors, constantly evolving and learning. It is a pleasure working with her and watching her grow.

Thank you for this fascinating interview, Corinne!

To see more of Corinne Whitaker's art, writing, musings, and more, visit her award-winning e-zine and website, <http://www.giraffe.com>



"Born of Chaos" (www.digitalgiraffe.com COVID cover image #9) ©Corinne Whitaker