

ABOUT the artist, Our Mother



"Irrational Exuberance" by Carol J Hay

All artwork in our brochure and on this web site taken from original paintings © Carol J Hay, our mother; used with permission. "The Sentry Box", "The Gift", "Confusion In Red", "Spiral Galaxy" – mixed media on canvas; "Whitewater", "Joy Cometh In the Morning", "After the Storm", "Irrational Exuberance" - oil on canvas. Photos of "The Gift" and "Whitewater" taken from giclee prints on canvas.

Our mother developed her interest in abstract art in the years shortly preceding her diagnosis. She was able to enjoy artistic expression during the early stages of her dementia, even after her language began to fade. We chose these paintings to represent the major tenets upon which Our Mother's Voice is founded, both as a visual connection to each of the concepts, and as a celebration of our mother's talent and the joy she found in her work.

The following is an "Artist's Statement" which our mother wrote on the occasion of a gallery opening in December 2006, which included all the paintings on this site and many others. It describes her love of art and the artistic process, and her inspiration for the paintings used by Our Mother's Voice.

Carol Hay: Journey in Art

My journey in the realm of art has taken me, in the broadest terms, from realism to the abstract; from water colors to oils, acrylics, and mixed media; from painting on 4"x6" paper or canvas board to using the largest canvases I can conveniently handle; from the use of delicate, transparent colors to the use of dense, intense, and vibrant media. This journey has not been

made simply to get to a destination by the shortest possible route. On the contrary, there were many starts and stops along the way, experimenting here, exploring there.

The variety of artistic modes appearing in this exhibit do not represent yesterday's paths that were abandoned in search of something better; they are, rather, paths that were pursued for their own sakes, for the sense of joy or fulfillment they themselves provided. I hope to visit most, if not all, of them again tomorrow.

Hence, there is no smooth line of development in my art from one stage to another. The important thing to me has not been to arrive at a preconceived goal, but to experience the journey itself.

At present I find myself painting in a more purely abstract mode than ever before. Abstract art has a special appeal for me because of the unique freedom it affords—not only the obvious freedom of form, color, line, texture, etc., but an inner, serendipitous freedom that comes from a source outside of myself. It simply happens.

For example, I frequently begin to paint with no idea where the painting will take me. I suppose one would say that I act randomly in choosing a canvas, paints, brushes or palette knife, and that I begin to apply them with no more thought than a very young child may have in playing in a mudpuddle—and, I may add, with the same unmitigated delight. Then there comes, sometimes but not always, a point when the medium takes on a life of its own, seeming to lead rather than be directed toward the accomplishment of a purpose. A moment of serendipity may arrive when I begin to see a motif, a “subject matter,” emerging. From that moment on, I try to do only what seems to be required of me to enhance the motif that the painting has presented to me. Signing my name at the bottom is my way of singing again, “*Ars gratia artis.*”

We want our website visitors to know a little more about our mother's life and her work. This brief biography illustrates her influence in our lives.

Our Mother

Carol Jones Hay, born Carol Eloise Jones, grew up mostly in Florida during the Depression, one of three children of a Presbyterian minister and his wife. “We didn't know we were poor,” she said, “because everybody was.” She remembered having suppers consisting only of grits and sliced tomatoes.

Part of her childhood was spent in Ocala, where she and her brother and sister learned about reptiles and amphibians from the expert who wrestled alligators in the Tarzan movies, filmed in the Silver Springs. She enthusiastically taught us, her daughters, as well as friends, neighbors and anyone else who would listen, never to kill a harmless snake, and how to identify the poisonous ones.

When we were children our mother taught kindergarten in underserved communities and was active in our local school's PTA. During these years, the early 1960s, she (together with our father) was one of few whites who worked to convince local school officials to complete the racial integration of our schools. Her deep feelings inspired us to befriend the “token” African American children in our school,

who represented the district's effort to pay lip service to the imperative set forth by Brown v. Board of Education. In 1963 she and our father took us to hear Martin Luther King, Jr. speak, despite the threat of violence surrounding him.

For 13 years our mother taught special education, resource room, and social studies classes in public middle school. While there she advocated for special-needs students and worked in local and state politics to improve conditions for public school teachers. She established a new resource room for special-needs students at a local residential school serving children of families in crisis. She served on the South Carolina Governor's Educator Improvement Task Force to help establish performance standards for new teachers entering the field in our state.

As a teacher, she worked hard to cross social boundaries and bring people together. Our father tells with delight of a day when he visited her classroom, where most of her students at the time were African-American. As he left the room, he heard a student say, "Mrs. Hay's married to a *white* man."

After our mother left teaching she returned to art, which she had studied in college. Her watercolors of still life and landscapes were popular locally, and we family members especially treasure her portraits of family and pets. In more recent years she discovered odorless synthetic oils and a new passion for abstract painting. "The Gift," a Nativity scene in gold and blue, is featured yearly by the retirement community where our parents live, and the Christmas card made from it was chosen by their church to raise funds for a local charity. The paintings you see on this website are all hers, and our design consultant for our print materials is her granddaughter, of whose talent she is immensely proud.

Whether defending harmless snakes, teaching disadvantaged children, or working for political and social change, our mother spent her life speaking out for those who could not speak for themselves or simply were not being heard. Suddenly silenced by the disabilities of dementia, she needed others to speak for her in her final years, until her death in February 2015. We as a family have learned much on our journey of advocacy, and we began Our Mother's Voice as a way of continuing her work of speaking up for others. We hope that the information here will enable other families to help their loved ones in nursing homes to live fulfilling lives of the greatest possible health, friendship, and joy.