

Brent Funderburk
Biographical Essay
2014

Born with a twin (how else can they be born?), I was a visual child. Mike turned trike pedals, listened for airplanes; I ate zinnia heads and followed ants under the fence to their destination and my destiny. There was trouble.

Before diagnosis as nearsighted, I believed, by visual hierarchy, that the dust motes in sun shafts all around my crib were important. All this stuff was after me. Inescapable. Later I was to notice- through technological extension- parents, sky, supernovas, The Future, Life, God. This larger view has not kept me from the preferred “on my knees” position with the zinnias.

In Carolina, I had Places To Go on this- The Day. The Woods. The Path, The Creek. The Ditch. Portals. They were exotic, vast, incomprehensibly wonder filled. I found things- I saw things- I drew things. I wanted/want to be alone. And now, twin, I want you to see too!

Trouble.

At East Carolina University in 1970 I met, on the first day (his first day there as well), I entered the design class of my life mentor Edward Arnold Reep (1918- 2013), who was the most ecstatic, angry being I had yet encountered. On That Day he burst into the studio classroom, late, and showed the color experiments of colleague Josef Albers who sought perfect harmony. But the school library had coldly and methodically rebound the richly hued, silkscreened pages in a new shuffle. Captain Reep (WW2 combat artist) was pissed. And elated! Heaven and Hell glimmered together. Obviously, color harmony was to be found on a slender thread between. After me.

Discovering American watercolor masters Charles Ephraim Burchfield (1893- 1967) and Walter Inglis Anderson (1903- 1965), I could see what they saw; the Portal through the color. In North Carolina I had a magazine clipped painting by each on my studio wall; no one else's. I taught at Nebraska Wesleyan University and then Mississippi State University. In the 'ssipp I was hired as a “Watercolor Painter”, the only time I've ever seen this job title advertised for a university position. I entered the world of Walter Anderson through a series of miracles. Ed Reep, Charles Burchfield, Walter Anderson- accident? I don't think so.

Data: I've taught for 34+ years- drawing, oil and watercolor painting- won MSU's Burlington Northern and Grisham teaching honors, exhibited widely, shown in 30+ one person shows, curated exhibits, lectured in museums and universities on my work and my ilk (Anderson, Burchfield, Will Henry Stevens, etc.), and was named the official artist of the USA International Ballet Competition in 2010. My wife, Debby, is a dancer/choreographer who also teaches at Mississippi State University. She is a wild child with as much passion and extroversion/introversion issues as me. We undergird each other- my soul twin- female style.

On a more relevant note, last night, I dreamed that my Dad (88) and I had to give three cats a bath. Oh, and they had antlers- beautiful antlers. We're not fond of cats. My son and I found a 65 million year old Mosasaur tooth last week, a mile from home. Jackson said, "To think, it has been sitting there in the ground, waiting for me, for millions of years." My older son in Nashville has a hit CD, "Novel and Profane", after the words of Henry David Thoreau. One of the lines in the lyrics of his song "If I Ever Wanted Easier (I Would Never Be With You)" is the gem, "I shat my life away."

Beautiful, inescapable trouble.

Finally, as I enter my Golden Years, I can see that the Portal that leads to the Place of Harmony shimmers, dissipates utterly, and shimmers again. (Causes me to capitalize some words and leave others alone). For this, I cuss and pray (as I have learned from my mentors), work hard and rest hard, wander and wonder- but not very Far. It is the same Day.

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