

McCLURE, from page 8

N.M.: Yes. He did weird paintings. Dark with scary figures. Like driving around Aberdeen at night.

R.L.: Did his art influence your work?

N.M.: No, but the first time I heard (Nirvana) I thought they were going beyond where any of us knew. Kurt was gifted totally and a treasure, destined to shine. He inspired me by keeping me in shape to his music. I was literally on the other side of the wall, so I could hear him play. He would go to the radio station to play, and he had that energy, that we all had, that he'd want to share his music.

R.L.: To return to your visual art, how did you begin paper cutting? Was linoleum printing too awkward?

N.M.: It was awkward and time consuming. You had to print it, and do everything in reverse, and I was bad at remembering that, because I'd just wanted to make a picture. My boyfriend at the time, Tae Won Yu, had gone to Cooper Union art school, and he suggested paper cutting.

R.L.: Do you work from sketches or photographs?

N.M.: I work more and more from photographs because digital photography has made that so convenient and easy. And my work has gotten more realistic.

R.L.: Which children's book artists do you like?

N.M.: Maurice Sendak ("Where the Wild Things Are") and Robert McCloskey ("Make Way for Ducklings"). And Tove Jansson. She's Finnish and wrote the Moomin books (about the adventures of a family of trolls).

When I was growing up, I liked her (black and white) pictures. They burned into my head.

R.L.: Did your paper cutting begin with your calendars?

N.M.: The calendars were a solution to the problem of an art show in a month. A friend suggested a calendar. Yes, I thought, that's 12 pictures, each with a month, and that helped.

I like working in series. The calendars become a story of sorts. Next year's calendar is about trees and limbs and arms. These trees are old, and I think it's about getting older myself and strength and endurance.

R.L.: Do you see your work as political?

N.M.: Yes and no. It isn't overtly political, but I feel I'm able to use my work to advocate for being better humans, and that can be political. It's quiet. I want to shine

the light on positive attributes of humanity.

I see my art as a way to bring hope. And I donate art to non-profits. Safeplace, a women's shelter in town, used a picture of a mother and child for domestic violence awareness. It has the same power that a more explicit image has.

R.L.: And your son inspired your new book "Mama, is it Summer Yet?"

N.M.: I was tuning him into the small changes in the natural world as summer awakens the earth. It's not a political book, but it encourages kids to be aware of the natural patterns of the earth, something we may be losing connection with, and encourages parents to explore that with their child.

R.L.: Is it a different process when you illustrate for someone else, as you did for acclaimed children's author Cynthia Rylant for "All in a Day"?

N.M.: It was intimidating. I got that assignment through an agent, but (Rylant) had seen my calendars at (a paper store) next to SAM in Seattle. So Cynthia Rylant knew of me, and a children's book agent arranged this "marriage." She wrote a book for my artwork (in) one sitting, and it was a beautiful poem.

R.L.: Do you have advice for artists who are just starting out and hoping to create a paying career?

N.M.: Show your work wherever you can: coffee shops, community centers, schools, libraries, churches, the doctor's office. The more people see your work, the more chance of opportunities.

Share your work whenever you can. Donate the use of an image for non-profit thank you cards and fundraising announcements. You can help them and they send your work out into the community.

Don't wait for permission, for the magic call from a gallery, publisher, agent, rep. Just start making what you want to make. Have art shows, make a book, give a performance. That call will come if you keep making instead of waiting. Besides, you are the best promoter of your work.

Start small, especially with print runs. Bit by bit, you will print more and be able to use some profit for food instead of paper. Also work with your printer to be as efficient as possible. If there is any trim, print on that: business cards, bookmarks, notepads all fit nicely on edges that would be recycled.

R.L.: What are your upcoming projects?

N.M.: This winter a cookbook, "How to Cook the Perfect Day," is coming out with food memories that, if put together, would make the perfect day. And I'm finishing another book on farmers' markets: about who grows your food, opening yourself to makers of your food, and knowing their stories and learning about them. The book was fun to do because I visited farmers' markets, looked at what I bought, and found out how they got started and why they're doing this.

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