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'I'll be an art student all my life'

ASTORIA ARTIST RENEE ROWE PURSUES THE ADVENTURE OF ART MAKING

By DWIGHT CASWELL

"When we moved to Astoria in 2015, I promised myself to paint full time," Renee Rowe says. "I have painted almost every day for about two years so far. I have a lot of growing to do in my art, and, being older, I didn't want to look back on my life and say, 'I managed galleries and sold other artists' work.'"

That's what she had been doing in Colorado, the most recent step in a long and eventful occupational trip before arriving in Astoria. Rowe's first stop was at Rutgers University where she took her first art class, despite having no background in art. Her instructor was pop artist Roy Lichtenstein. "Going to college blew my mind," she says, "and opened a whole new world to me."

That world included becoming a social worker ("with a case load of jazz musicians") and later a computer consultant to major corporations. She didn't like the corporate world though and decided to move on. She worked in art galleries, eventually owning one, and took a detour into designing aquaponic systems. All the time she was making art in her spare time, and when she finally decided to follow her heart by painting, she began looking for a new place to do it. She and her husband, James, checked out the Northwest to be closer to her grandkids and to the water. Portland was "too big, busy and expensive," but spending one day in Astoria convinced them to make the town their home.

Rowe believes that our



PHOTO BY DWIGHT CASWELL

Renee Rowe poses for a portrait at Grace Episcopal Church in Astoria, where she recently showed her paintings.

society, "is in a period of change. We want a breakthrough, not just to tear down but to build up. I'd like in a small way to give something back, to use my art for good."

That might include teaching, or opening a gallery, or simply continuing to paint. Rowe seems open to almost anything, but whatever she does she will continue to paint. "I'll be an art student all my life," she says. "I've been in love with art all my life, but that doesn't necessarily make me a great artist. However, when I'm in the zone, it's like heaven. There's no stress. We're spiritual creatures, and I feel a kind of oneness with everything. It's euphoric."

Today, Rowe continues to paint in her garage studio in Astoria. She's had a show of her work at Grace Episcopal Church and exhibits her paintings at Fairweather House & Gallery in Seaside.

"I'm learning how to look at light and shadow in a new way. I'm learning to see light differently," she says. "It's an adventure. Landscapes, cityscapes, abstract works, it all interests me, and we'll see what happens."

How to characterize Rowe's work? She is known for both her Northwest landscapes and her abstract paintings. Of her landscapes she says, "I am totally enchanted and cannot imagine ever tiring of attempting to capture the majesty of this wondrous place. I hope to encourage the viewer to appreciate our environment and help to save it." Of her abstract works she says that she never knows what's going to happen: "It's very freeing, like playing a game. Recently, the works have several elements that include a movement of light fields, boxes and color transitions."

"If you call me any-

thing," Rowe says, "call me an impressionist or abstract painter." She doesn't consider the label important: "I don't necessarily want to be famous, and I was never really interested in the money. That's not the reason I paint. I want to please myself and at the same time inspire people and lift their spirits."

As for the future, Rowe may decide to open a new gallery in Astoria. "In a gallery I like people to feel welcome and to enjoy themselves, and if you like a painting and it would please you to see it every day, you should have it."

If she does return to the gallery business, though, it will not be to the exclusion of making art. "That's where I would have my studio," she says, "and whether it's through my work or the work of others, I would like to make a contribution to the art world."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

"View of Astoria II" by Renee Rowe.



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"Ilwaco Port" by Renee Rowe.



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"Ocean View" by Renee Rowe.



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"Contra Punto" by Renee Rowe.