

"The process of creating art is often demanding and arduous. It demands great discipline and courage. It teaches us about who we are and what we are capable of."

— *Richard Danzig*

"saying you were an artist was like jumping off the cliff with no parachute and hoping for a soft landing."

— *Jackeuline Walters*

Stories of healing

collected by
Luiza Budea

Meredith Mulhearn
Charles Gulbrandsen
Jackeuline Walters
Patrice Joy Zinda Mahon
Jennifer Glover Riggs
Clarice Shirvell
Frances Goulart
Richard Danzig
Jim Malloy
Claudia Noel Nerreau
Iulian Budea
Steve Liker

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in collaboration with
rpacgallery.com
(203) 894 5609



Foreword:

I practically grew up in the the arts, passing through different eco-systems of artists, art-schools, galleries, collectors and institutions.

Eventually I found that my experience of the arts was vastly different from the prevailing social perceptions. Many of the narratives around art centered on a “*toxic genius*” artist figure. Such narratives provided absurd role models for my peers and served to overshadow a plethora of positive experiences of genuine value.

I collected these stories in an effort to promote valuable yet ignored narratives about art. Through them I hope to change the way art is seen. I hope to give people art as a tool to build themselves and as a medicine to restore their bodies and minds.

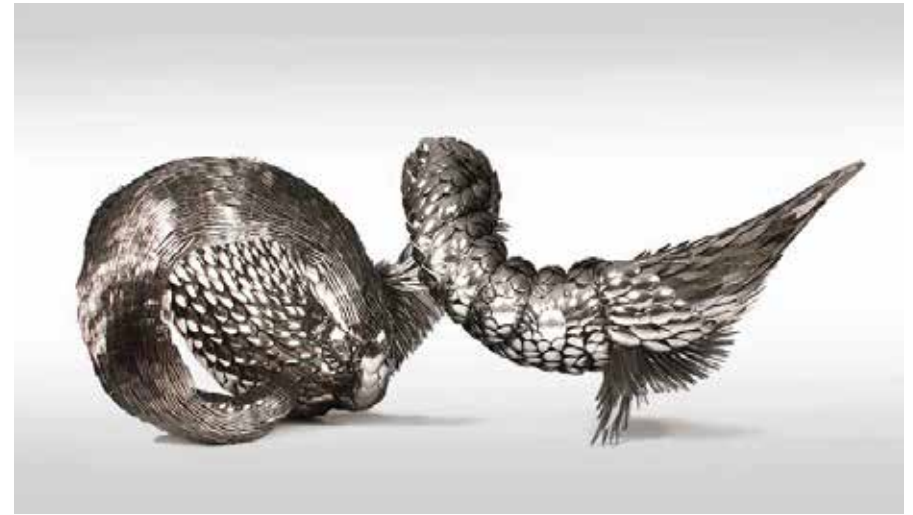
— *Luiza Budea*

Sasha Meret

healing without medicine

— *“When I am immersed in a creative activity, my Parkinson’s symptoms vanish for the duration of the creative session.”*

Sashameret.com



Sasha Meret was diagnosed with Parkinson’s in 2003. Contrary to any expectations, he discovered that “when my mind was in a creative mode, the Parkinson’s symptoms were practically disappearing. It was a logical decision to dedicate as much time as possible to any creative activity.”

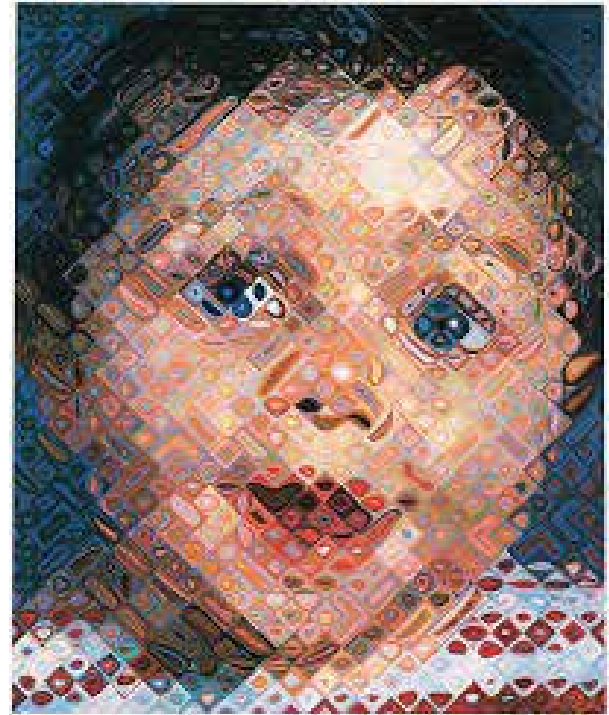
Sixteen years after his initial diagnosis, he is still a productive artist, 100% independent and scores 80-90% in efficiency of motor execution. “It is my belief that art and my creative process has greatly contributed in stemming the advancement of my disease,” he writes. Sasha Meret has been a spokesman at *The First Symposium: Fine Art and Dance as therapies in Parkinson’s Disease*; shared his experience with PhD candidates at a leading research institutes and have been featured in medical publications.



Chuck Close

The artist who draws faces he cannot recognize

Close suffers from a neurological condition known as prosopagnosia or face-blindness, which prevents him from recognizing faces. That includes the faces of loved ones, family members and close friends.



This motivated him to paint the faces of his friends and colleagues as a means of exploring them. Unable to trace a person's distinctive characteristics, he divided their photographs into pixel-like squares which he meticulously transposed to canvas.

Jackeuline recovery and recollection Walters

— *“It was a long, slow recovery and my art was my only reprieve.”*

On display at Touch of Sedona, 452 Main St
akayakreation.com



The incident that would derail Jackeuline’s life was strikingly mundane: a simple fall as she headed to work. A concussion left her unable to work, watch TV, use a computer or cell phone.

“It was a long, slow recovery and my art was my only reprieve. I started in earnest sketching and painting again, to pass the time and to regain a sense of purpose. I started with simple outlines and compositions, and found it helped me relax, reduced my headaches and help me regain my focus and self confidence. It took several months to improve my health, and my artistic skills improved as well. Eventually I amassed over 20 pieces, focusing on recreating memories of my caribbean childhood, days spent in our garden in Jamaica, with my 12 siblings.”

“Coming out as an artist, was very difficult, having spent the last 28 years in Corporate Finance, which defined my success based on rising up the executive ranks. However, *saying you were an artist was like jumping off the cliff with no parachute and hoping for a soft landing.* But I must say, the past 18 months, have lead me on an amazing journey, meeting new friends, discovering and learning about different mediums, while I navigate this newly discovered path into the Arts. I still have a lot to learn, but I am looking forward to my “second mountain”, my renewed passion to pursue my childhood dream of becoming an artist.”

— *Jackeuline Walters*

Richard

when God walks through the room

Danzig

The process of creating art is often demanding and arduous. It demands great discipline and courage. It teaches us about who we are and what we are capable of. It connects us with something that is universal and true.

On display at William Pitt Sotheby's, 470 Main St.
www.richarddanzig.com



— *Montauk Grey* by Richard Danzig

Artists describe the creation of art as “God walking through the room”. Although I am not a religious person, painting has taught me what this means. It is the moment when there is no paint, no brush and no self. There is only wonder at a creation which the artist recognizes that he neither created nor can take credit for. It is a moment when the artist is both the actor and the observer. It is a connection with something universal and profound. It is an exhilarating and awe inspiring experience.

— *Richard Danzig*

Meredith

“Vestiges” - a painting about transforming memory

Mulhearn

Beneath Meredith’s painting lies an unpleasant memory. Seeking to transform it into something positive, she covered it in gesso and applied adhesive, allowing it to drip down as tears over the blanched texture of the underpainting. She then launched pigment powder to create vibrant clouds of color over the surface to transform the piece into an expression of joy.



“The value of art (as in life) lies not in the destination, but in the journey. For me, the artistic process nourishes my soul and teaches me valuable lessons. Through creative expression, I manage my daily stress and find catharsis. In this piece, entitled “Vestiges” I explored memories of times past and discovered that both the good and bad times have shaped who I am today and will forever be part of me. The creative process allowed me to let go of negativity and see the good that has emerged from the struggle. Art allows the subconscious a voice in a way that can’t be expressed verbally, and it is here that true healing can begin.”

— *Meredith Mulhearn*

On display at Fairfield County Bank Insurance 401 Main St
RPAC Gallery 410 Main Street
rpcgallery.com/meredith-mulhearn

Jennifer Glover Riggs

a state of flow

Art has helped Jennifer through the most difficult time in her life.

— “The joy that I feel when I create is contagious, and I’ve heard stories from many people that I’ve taught fluid acrylic painting of how much creating has helped them heal as well.”



“I stumbled onto art during a very difficult time in my life. I was recently divorced, and my mother had passed away from cancer. At the same time, my ex husband and grandmother became very ill, and I was at the end of my rope dealing with it all. I was lucky enough to meet the man who is now my husband during that difficult time, and he is an artist. When we were dating, he always encouraged my kids and I to experiment and play around with his materials. Through this play, I realized that I enjoyed creating, and experienced a state a “flow” that helped me forget about all of the craziness for a bit. This dabbling let to me becoming more serious about my art, and as I got better at it, I began sharing my process and techniques with the community as well.”

— *Jennifer Glover Riggs*

Charles Gulbrandsen

A sudden call to action

Charles is painting
like there is no tomorrow.
Because for him, there might not be...

rpacgallery.com/charles-gulbrandsen



“When I found myself lying in the sterile racket of that MRI tube, I had to ask myself: ‘If my vision is no longer guaranteed, what should I attempt to do?

...If not now, when?’”

Charles has been painting pretty much all his life, but for many years he did not actually create. Charles grew up in an artistic family. His grandfather, Charles G. Gulbrandsen painted the ceiling at Grand Central Terminal in 1913 and again in 1945, a project that left a big imprint on the family history. Having inherited his grandfather’s great skill and talent, he found immediate success doing restorations and commissions, even taking part in the latest restoration of his grandfather’s masterpiece.

For thirty years onward, he was a bit like a Harry Donovan (the main character of the 1998 film “Incognito” centered around a forged Rembrandt). He could paint in any historical style with great accuracy, but never his own. He worked for a roster of colorful and sometimes excentric clients. “I was taking orders like sandwiches in a Deli,” he casually jokes now about his larger-than-life murals and expert reproductions of old masters, “but I never actually painted for myself.”

This went on until life gave him a nudge. “Several years ago I was experiencing severe headaches and blurred peripheral vision. Rather than the run of the mill migraine I expected, I was diagnosed with a pituitary brain tumor, which had set up camp on the bridge of my optic nerve.” Deemed too precarious to remove, the tumor posed a looming threat to Charles’ eyesight that would move him into creative action.

The doctors determined that the tumor was benign and that Charles could live the rest of his life without being severely affected by it. But since that day, Charles put commissions aside and began to search for a style of his own.

It takes a lot of courage to create something unique. When you make your own style, you no longer have the luxury of resting on someone else's laurels; your own self-worth is suddenly at stake. People start judging. Experiments may lead nowhere. Producing something of value is no longer a guarantee and even if produced, there is no guarantee that people will acknowledge it. Still, with his own eyesight at risk, Charles began taking risks as well.

"So began my creative journey to rediscover the sound of my own voice," says Charles, "to finally create, to express in paint, without the safety net of another's style, but to forge my own. If healing is in fact, a return to balance, then creating my own art has been the scale upon which I have returned to center."

Charles Gulbrandsen's work is on view at:
RPAC Gallery, 410 Main Street
Atria Ridgefield, 392 Main Street



Jacob's Ladder
by Charles Gulbrandsen

"That little *hour glass* of mine has actually been a gift. A gift of awareness, clarity and purpose. After having spent many years creatively adrift, this journey to center has been a long, but necessary one. It has given my soul the time it needed to mature, to heal, to grow, to find my way home."

-Charles Gulbrandsen



It is a risky thing to admit and even more risky to make public. It takes both courage and confidence to reveal. I write this not for the galleries or the self-proclaimed critics, but to benefit those who feel or have ever felt the same.

“Not Good Enough” is the plague of our time,

a message that shouts louder and louder from magazines, tv’s and billboards. Children become self-conscious earlier and earlier. It is the means by which we become ensnared into consumption, addictions and spending. The means by which we are made to buy what we don’t really need. The fallout is disastrous and the push against it takes momentum. It is a terrible thing to steal from people their own sense of self-worth.

Iulian Budea

My brother was recognized early on by all family, friends and teachers, to be an exceptional and prodigious talent. It was something I never ceased to admire about him. He always learned everything so fast; drew, painted and sculpted with such skill and sensitivity that - by no exaggeration - he could shape marble like Michaelangelo and I never managed to see an ounce of difference in skill or talent between the two.

And it wasn’t just the skill. He could always see things that others missed and capture subtleties that others never felt. It was clear from the beginning that he saw the world with different eyes and that is still the most valuable thing about him. But he would also periodically destroy his own work.



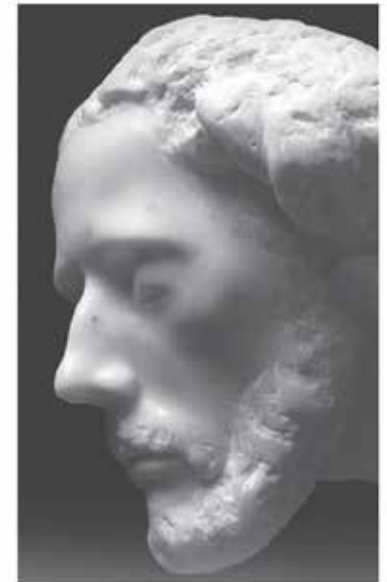
I only got around yesterday, years after he first reduced his works to rubble and shreds, to asking him why.

The answer, though I had suspected, nevertheless came as a shock; here was the person whom I admired and tried to emulate telling me that he thought his work wasn't good enough.

There's never any shortage in the world of haters and critics and I assume he's seen his share... but to actually believe them? That's something else. I can see my brother's worth, as well as my own. I hope one day everyone can find theirs.

— *Luiza Budea*

[instagram.com/necessary_creations/](https://www.instagram.com/necessary_creations/)
On View at William Pitt Sotheby's, 470 Main St.



Luiza Budea



The power of an image

luizabudea.com
RPAC Gallery, 410 Main Street

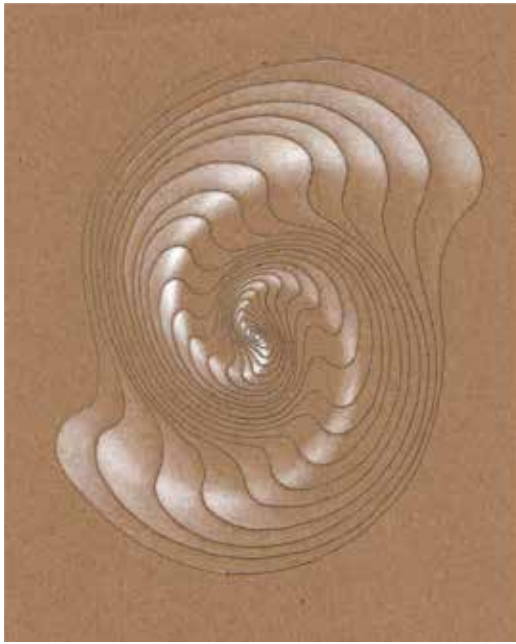
Life-altering events needn't be great or dramatic. They can be little things that *click* in a moment moment of silence.

I had no interest in abstract art and only an aesthetic understanding of it, even as I completed a BFA at a top school. For years I didn't draw or paint feeling that everything I'd been taught was either superfluous or obsolete. The revelation came browsing idly through online images.

I stumbled on an image with negative content, which provoked such an unpleasant sensation as it is difficult to describe. It was as if someone else's emotions were struggling to overtake my own and though unsuccessful, I felt surrounded and overwhelmed by them. It was like fingernails screeching on chalkboard or spiders crawling on my skin. I had never experienced anything of the sort. The image was only a geometric design.

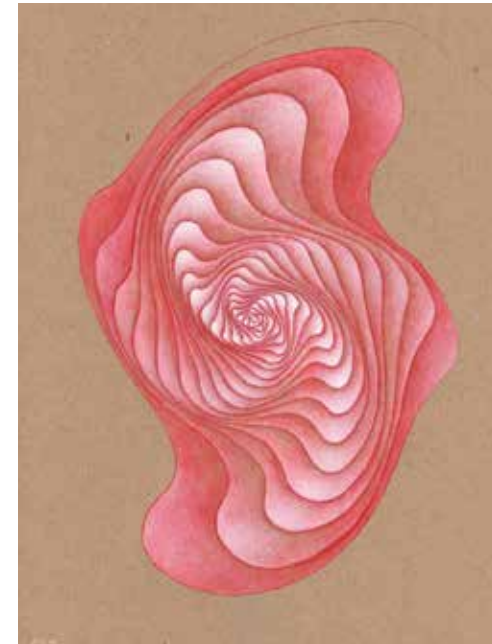
I sought to escape that sensation. I turned my gaze from the computer screen to one of the pictures I had taped to the wall for reference, one of my favorite works of art. The effect was immediate. A good feeling washed over me like a pleasant waterfall, replacing the negative one.

This is how I learned to look beyond aesthetics, and what I saw changed my life.



After that experience, I became keenly aware of the subliminal effects of imagery. I realized that people are bombarded daily with negative visual impressions and although they are unaware of it (as I once was), it does have an effect on them.

The biggest culprit was advertising. Leafing through a fashion magazine, I felt that same negative sensation echoing from the glossy pages. I realized that going through daily life, people receive thousands of such impressions, at the pharmacy, the grocery store, from billboards, cell phones and product packaging: a cacophony of visual voices clamoring for our attention.



Suddenly art had a new meaning. I began making paintings that could counter that optical onslaught. Images that could heal the damage and restore balance.

I began to study the ways in which artists have for centuries used harmonies of color and proportion to empower human beings. I began to use those same aesthetic elements to make paintings that could alter the atmosphere of a room in a positive way, and people have walked up to me to say that **it worked.**

Clarice

Overcoming Creative Block

Shirvell

Artists call it “the zone,” the state of mind and spirit required in order to create... Clarice felt a need to understand and define it.



Clarice noticed that sketching had a meditative quality, one that she could sometimes capture and sometimes not. Artists have called it “being in the zone,” or “a state of flow,” Clarice calls it **“being Present.”**

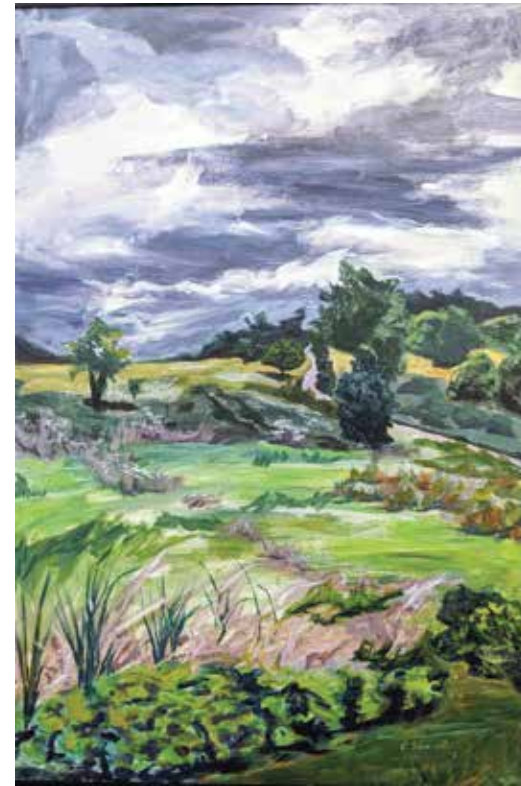
On display at Guided Lynx, 458 Main St.
[instagram.com/clariceshirvellart](https://www.instagram.com/clariceshirvellart)

“How can we harness creative flow? Where does it come from?”

In her search to answer those questions, Clarice stumbled upon “The Artist’s Way” by Julia Cameron, a book that has taken center stage in a recent Time magazine special on Creativity. Time Magazine dwelves deeper into the science of the creative state: it involves turning off certain neural networks while turning on others. Every artist finds their own means of achieving this and it is a powerful exercise with unknown implications for neurological health.

Children are naturally creative. They *do* without *thinking*, fully immersed in exploring the task at hand. It is around 4th grade that children start to worry about how others view what they create, about their work “being good enough.” Psychologists call it “the fourth grade slump,” and little by little other worries pile up as they grow up, about the past, about the future, about social status. The adult then has to reverse this process, shutting down the part of the brain that thinks and worries, and awakening the things that allow inspiration to flow.

“The Artist’s Way” provides twelve steps to help with this process. Through morning journals, reflection, and Artist’s dates and with the support of an artist group, Clarice found a way to unblock and tune into her creative flow. She became so passionate about sharing The Artist’s Way, that she began creating Artists Salons, and spreading the art of sketching for relieving stress and finding gratitude in simple everyday things. She now teaches her passion through The Artist’s Way Study Groups and Creative Flow Workshops in Ridgefield and the surrounding towns.



“Being present helps,” says Clarice, “when you become overwhelmed by the future, the past or the stress in your everyday. Sketching is calming and meditative and helps me appreciate the beauty in something that may be over looked in a busy life. Sketching requires you to really look at something to see things for the first time, to be present, like a small child discovering something new.”

— Clarice Shirvell



SHANAZ

Shine on you crazy diamond

This is one of Shanaz' pictures, not of her past, but of the eternal sky; as wonderful as she saw it. It would make a more fitting conclusion to her story. We are all star-dust.

I met and photographed the artwork of Shanaz Aryeh when I lived in New York (She passed away some years ago). She made large collages out of carefully selected craft-store stickers, glitter and her own makeup. She assembled huge complex scenes of cities, farms, beaches, deserts, with plants and animals and the rare presence of people. As I took pictures, we talked about the artwork and soon realized they were all collages of wishes and memories; places where she had been and wanted to revisit, her childhood in quaint european towns where the church figured prominently, her later years in large American cities like New York and Miami, her visit(s) to Israel, the Holy Land.

I also realized that in every image the subject was missing. There were picnic tables laid out, overflowing with the best food that stickers could offer; empty lounge chairs by the water's edge with two cocktails for the absent sitters to enjoy as they watched the sunset; empty benches in the park with no people to enjoy a pleasant summer evening; a pair of

flip-flops on the beach, by the water's edge left by the person who had gone swimming. In many of the pictures you could find a guitar or a camera as a placeholder.

Shanaz had lost her only son to an overdose (years before the opioid epidemic was publicly acknowledged) and his favorite hobbies were photography and playing the guitar. Night after night Shanaz would meticulously build these worlds full of tiny details for herself and her son to inhabit. "Everyone is singing and everyone is in love," she described the minute inhabitants of her worlds, insects, birds and animals. And indeed each little black ant had a companion and even the sticker snails dwelt in pairs, with little hearts or musical notes emanating from their midst. Each night she was building a heaven for herself and the one she loved most, revisiting the quiet moments and happy memories that they had had together. And those feelings of love and happiness is what she decided to share with the world.

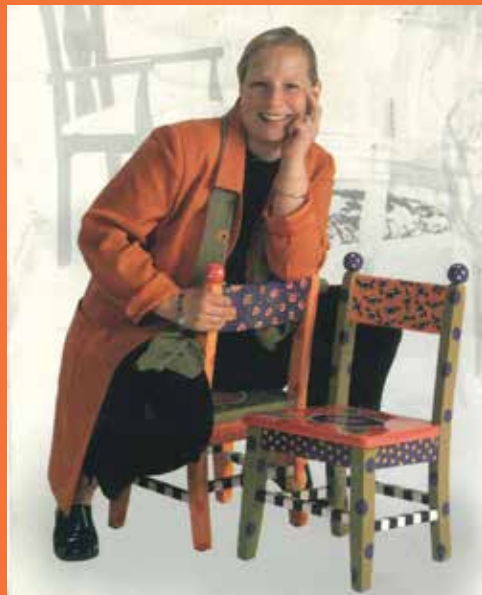
— Luiza Budea

Patrice Joy Zinda Mahon

Inspiration and Hero

to family and many

friends over the course of her 21 year breast cancer journey. Patrice shared her artistic expression in friendship, writing, furniture painting and needlepoint.



Her fun and whimsical style were constants in staying positive over two decades. Particular favorites of Patrice's were to paint children's furniture, nurseries and needlepoint Tooth Fairy Pillows for children of family and friends.

Art completely transformed her mind to fully live and share her life with many.

Patrice passed away on Sept. 28, 2015. She was the wife of Terrence Mahon, RPAC resident artist.

Frances

Condoleance and Consolation

Goulart

Frances gifted one of her pieces to a faraway friend facing difficult circumstances.



[instagram.com/goulartfrances/](https://www.instagram.com/goulartfrances/)

On display at William Pitt Sotheby's 470 Main Street

**“That drawing still hangs over his desk.
Having a part, I hope, in his healing”**

A picture can sometimes turn out to be worth a thousand words (and prayers).

An old friend from my halcyon twenties who had moved far away suddenly got in touch. He had lost his wife of many years, moved to New Mexico from Detroit and now found himself quite alone heartbroken and lonely.

What to say by way of condolence that doesn't sound like a trite Hallmark card?? What to do to show an old friend (a distinguished poet and professor) some loving kindness? A card was not enough, a phone call wouldn't linger.

But an original piece of art expressing the idea of the timeless and unending nature of our connectedness seemed appropriate.

That drawing still hangs over his desk. Having a part, I hope, in his healing.

This is what makes being an artist a noble calling.

— *Frances Goulart*

Claudia Noel Nerreau

Seeing the beauty in every person

“I believe these individuals to be brave, beautiful people who deserve our respect, acceptance and support.”



On view at HaFo Coffeeshop ,417 Main Street

Claudia is drawn to highlighting the value in everyday people through her portraits. Two themes that she has explored in her candid paintings are motherly love and transgender identity. Her painting, *Mother Love 1* depicts a mother kissing her daughter as she leaves for prom night. *Mother Love II* depicts a joyful mother cherishing her newborn.

Claudia has worked on *Translate Honor*, an exhibit of portraits through which she hopes to dignify and honor members of the transgender community. “I believe these individuals to be brave, beautiful people who deserve our respect, acceptance and support,” she writes.

“People are complex and interesting. I believe that our differences enrich this world and that we should embrace rather than reject them. Differences should not be feared. Differences are not threatening.

We are all more than our gender identity or sexual orientation. We are more than our race or our ethnicity. We are more than our age, physical characteristics, religion, political party, education, career or any single identifier. As a society we need to accept all people and stop lumping individuals into sub-groups for purposes of identity, segregation and discrimination.

My subjects are all people that I honor and respect for their individuality and courage. They look like anyone you might meet. I challenge you, the viewer, to look at them and see them as individuals full of promise. See them without a gender identity label.”

www.claudianerreau.com

Jim Malloy

3 Dreams

Jim had 3 things he had always wanted to do: write a book, make a film and create an album of original songs... His career was the only thing stopping him.

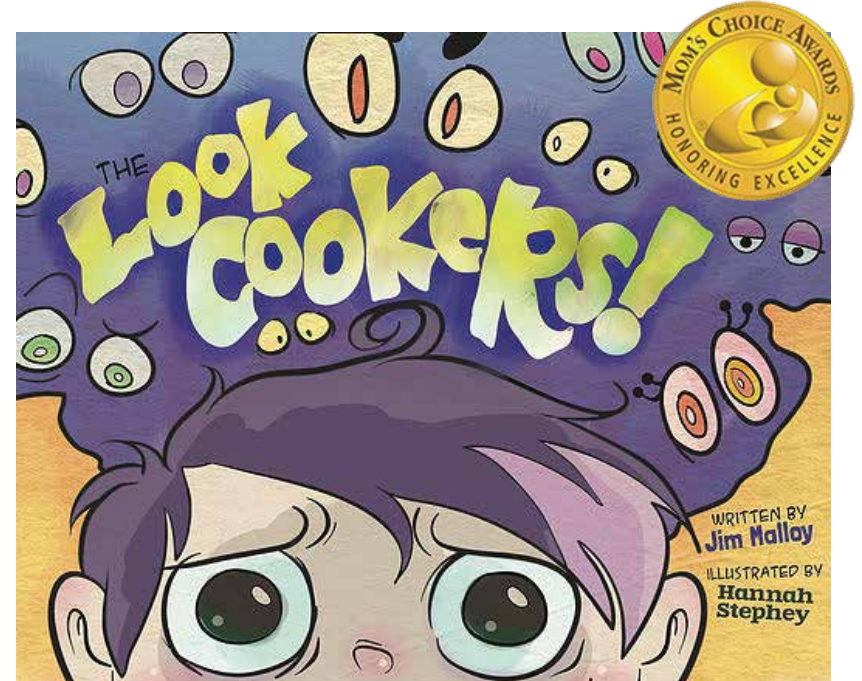
www.3dreamscreative.com

On view at Rpac Gallery, 410 Main St
Town Hall, 400 Main St

— “*what are you waiting for?*”

“After a successful, but highly stressful, career in marketing I knew I was burnt out. The long hours, endless client meetings and corporate politics had taken a toll. The worst part was that I had put off for far too long what I really wanted to do ‘*when I grew up.*’”

“One day, over lunch, after listening to my rather long list of unfulfilled dreams, a good friend looked me in the eye and said ‘*what are you waiting for?*’ Her words struck home.”





—The recording studio of 3 Dreams Creative



—screenshot from "Let's Try this Again"
produced and directed by Jim Malloy

"When I graduated from college, I challenged myself to accomplish three things in the arts: write a book, make a film and create an album of original songs. They were my three dreams. In fact, when I launched my publishing company I named it 3 Dreams Creative Enterprises - to constantly remind myself of this creative quest."

Jim is accomplishing his three dreams with the same professionalism and dedication that characterized his career.

His success challenges the implied notion that the renaissance man is a rare and extraordinary occurrence that does not exist in our time.

Now Jim has a fourth passion to add to the mix: painting.

"It began one day when I was engaged in a mighty struggle with writers block - and it was winning. I decided to step away from my computer for a while and stumbled upon some acrylic paint in an old shoe box and a ream of 12"x18" paper that had been given to me many years ago. So I began to paint. It was immediately fascinating. The joy of discovery and expression was intoxicating. And deeply fulfilling." Jim began to invent new ways to apply paint with found objects: credit cards, CD jewel cases, aspirin bottles, glue syringes and more. "Painting for me is a captivating dance; an unbridled exploration of emotion, imagination, tension and serenity."

"As for stress, I can't even spell the word anymore."

— Jim Malloy



"Torch Song" by Jim Malloy
www.rpacgallery.com/jim-malloy

RPAC Gallery, 410 Main Street

**Luiza Budea
& other RPAC artists**

**Fairfield County Bank Insurance
401 Main St**

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