

ARTIST OF LIFE



Rassouli

HE HAS BEEN CALLED A DELIGHT, A TROUBLEMAKER, A LEGEND, A MESSENGER, A VISIONARY, AND AN ARTIST, BUT THE DESCRIPTION THAT ENDEARS HIM TO THOSE WHO KNOW HIM IS THAT OF TRUE FRIEND OF THE HEART. MEET THE MYSTIC RASSOULI...

R

assouli is known in the art world for his stunning and insightful canvases. He was born in Iran to a family of mystics, and was influenced by the mystics of the east. He studied and practiced painting and architecture in the west and is currently living in Southern California. Rassouli is an artist of life, one who lives and expresses whatever he does from his heart. He describes himself as an ogler and a libertine, as one who sees beneath the surface, one who is free to express what he sees and feels and imagines! Whoever you thought he was yesterday, you can be sure he will bring something fresh and new to today, and he will surely come up with something fun for tomorrow.

He speaks about creativity in person, in his retreats, through talks to groups, on the radio, in videos, and in films, and nowhere does he do it more magically than through his paintings. Rassouli throws rules to the winds and dives into the moment and savours it, and his excitement for the process affects and stimulates everyone around him to do the same! He paints with rags, with his hands, and uses his favourite brushes when he feels moved to enhance what is happening on the canvas. He begins with a canvas primed with black paint and brings the light of vision to it, developing a relationship with the emerging image as he progresses.

So who is Rassouli? He has been called a delight, a troublemaker, a rascal, a rogue, a legend, a messenger, a visionary, and an artist, but the description that endears him to those who know him is that of true friend of the heart. To know him is to feel inspired, to feel real and alive, and to feel free to remember joy.

Here are some excerpts from our interview with the artist...

You are known for your unique style of Fusionart. How would you describe the creative process behind it?

"Fusionart is about painting with spirit rather than with intellect. It is the creative process of expressing the beauty that is within every one, instead of what we reflect through observation. It is about experiencing the mystery of the unknown and let it express through the artist. This creative process, in turn, opens the portal to the viewers' own being to discover who they truly are and who they can be.

"Fusionart is to open those secret places inside the artists to let the vibrant emotions they have held inside to pour out on the canvas and remember what it feels like to play in the sand as a child, to relish the patterns and designs that can be discovered as they emerge, to feel the thrill of creating, to be surprised by the images that appear through the creative process.

"Those who respond to the call to create the beauty that comes pouring out from within their heart are called Fusionartists. They create their visions through imagination and through an internal guidance of creative energy that comes from merging with the life that is already flowing in the universe. This frees

Fusionartists to explore, to create, to wipe them out, to rearrange them, to turn the canvases upside down, and to feel the fun in watching images come to life.

"I describe Fusionart process as Leila; a Sanskrit word which is descriptive of the free play. This is divine play in which the players have no attachment to the end result. They allow the precious energy of life to flow freely within them and through them as they create. I call this creative act leilaing.

"Fusionartists are free to delight in the colours and forms and visions that flow from their inner life. They partner with creation to surrender into the exploration of an ever unfolding process of discovery. As leilaing continues, suddenly, an image appears in a form that has become something completely new. It is a moment of Joy for the artist. Through this process, Fusionartists give birth to themselves, and then, magically, a friend appears, who had been dwelling within them all along.

"As painters, Fusionartists sometimes paint with rags, as well as with brushes, and they use their fingers and hands to touch the paint as they softly spread it on the canvas. It is a surrendering to the creative process that draws them into the sensory experience and develops it as it becomes more and more like the sensual feelings of lovers. The canvas becomes a lover enticing the artist to fuse with the love that has surrounded them both.

"Fusionart develops through creating and through its process, not by learning technical knowledge, but by envisioning a path that allows the artists to create utilizing what comes most naturally to them, through exploring what attracts them most, and what they may then apply to what they do.

"When a bond is made between artists and their creations, what appears on the canvas is no longer viewed as something separate from the artist. It is different from most other approaches to painting, because creation is not isolated from the one who creates. When art is chosen to enter as relationship, the artist doesn't know what the end result will be. When it is judged, one result is compared with another.

"When a Fusionartist chooses a colour to use for a painting, it is the beauty and enjoyment of choosing that suggest the variation of creation. If it were chosen on the basis of a set of rules about art, it would invite judgments to be made.

"In a certain sense, Fusionart is a process not unlike transcendent meditation, which is all about clearing the way and emptying the mind of limitation to make room for expansion. It is not about focusing inward such as it happens in other kinds of meditation. In Fusionart, the artist has no ethical connection to what he or she paints in the sense of trying to judge it.

"If a Fusionartist is painting the sky, he

or she tries to paint the colours of how they imagine the sky. They may go beyond the sky and bring qualities to it to represent the intensity of feelings they have on a particular morning. Sometimes, they may turn inward and explore a vision they have that flows from spirit. Fusionartists are prophetic in some ways, for they reach beyond what they see and bring it into being through the visioning process.



In the Beginning

"Perhaps the most outstanding feature of Fusionart is painting connections. The intention is to unite the opposites while beautifying their variation. The achievement of Fusionart is connecting the creator with the creation."

You are also known as a mystic artist...would you attribute the mysticism in your work to your Sufi influences?

"My uncle, who was my earliest guide, was a Sufi mystic. His guidance, along with many mystical concepts of Sufi's, in my own development represents the powerful presence of mystery in my artworks."

"The mystery is important to the creative process in Fusionart. In fact, it is a key factor in distinguishing it from other styles of art. Fusionart does not need to be explained. It is what it is, and it invites the viewer into the artwork. Sufi mysticism attracts me because it does not require a specific knowledge to respond or to enjoy it. That is extremely appealing to me, because it allows me to be free in my own creative response."

"The images that have developed in my works as a Fusionartist have been drawn from the psyche, from the subconscious, and in some rare instances, they emerge from the mysterious unconscious, which is the blind area in every person of which they are unaware (and may never be aware of in themselves)."

"I believe, what is unknown to the artist can be an extremely fertile resource for creating. Learning painting techniques would help to express them better. It is the medium not the meaning we should master."

"The sense of the artist in painting is the feeling of an overflow of creative energy that manifests on the canvas, through practice we are able to renew the energy and heightened feeling of expressing it. When I work with others to develop their works, I guide them in the process of letting this happen."

"How does my heart feel guided to develop the field of colours? This is a conversation with my inner world. Particularly this flows from the world of feeling, and is communicated through the heart; through a flow of energy from the heart or the soul."

Do you consider your workshops and retreats to be a form of art therapy? How are these retreats programmed to bring out the creativity and spirituality of the artist?

"I believe, Fusionart retreats are much more effective than art therapy. While an art therapist, such as my own wife, concentrate on connecting the individual with their subconscious energy, my creativity retreats offer the unique opportunity to gather for an extended time and not only learn



Breath of Creation



Shores of Heaven



Touch of Love

about Fusionart, but share the energy of creating as a group. These events combine my discussions about the creative process, Fusionart and how to open up to the inner creator. The workshops include specific exercises to assist participants in opening up to the creative flow."

"My workshops are usually held in atmosphere filled with creative energy and camaraderie. I guide the participants to feel the joy of opening to the flow of their inner creator. They become involved with creating in various medium of art from music, writing and acting to painting, sculpting and more. A Fusionart creativity retreat is an experience that has changed many austere lives into blissed ones! "Fusionart Painting Retreats or workshops are held in the style of the traditional atelier of old European painters where students join together sharing the expertise of a master artist while experiencing a connection and unique form of guidance. Participants immerse themselves in the energy of the Fusionart community and discover new ways to open their creative channels. It provides an opportunity for exploration, discovery and profound experiences. As a special treat, I usually render an entire painting from beginning to end in front of the participants."

What do you believe the medium of paint, combined with abstract depiction, brings to our understanding of an image?

"I am influenced by literature. It is my drive to bring it into visual art. I connect with it to bring it into the world in a splendid and attractive way! I take from that many times, unaware that it is the depiction of the literary language and the depiction of the sound of the music that I listen to as I paint or even

the rhythm of the movement that develops the images internally."

"When the medium of paint is used rationally, it gives us an image that is familiar to us. When it is combined with our inner abstraction of what we have seen, it develops through our perception in a new way. We experience the form as a known form such as when I speak of a tree, millions of trees come into your perception as you hear me. This is your depiction, or your impression of what you heard."

"The result of combining abstract depiction with the reality develops the image in an entirely new way than if it were depicted in reality as in a photo. If an artist is painting in that state, he reflects the physical world on his canvas. As long as he does not try to solidify the images into certain known forms, he would reflect the desire of the artist. He penetrates deep enough to perceive some other form to visualize an abstract depiction of an image."

Is one born an artist or can one develop into an artist as one goes through training and education? "We are all born in the image of our creator, whatever or whoever that is. We are, therefore, created to create. What we need to do is to remove the outer identity by which we are known to ourselves and others. When we play and create as a child, or in the purity of making love with the canvas, we enter into the purity of experiencing beauty created through the eyes of love. Each of us experiences this through our own uniqueness and our own alignment with creation energy. There is a thrill we feel when we shed the restraints and allow the energy to flow through us and reach

out to touch the canvas. The experience by itself develops energy in the viewer that will fuse with what has been created."

How would you describe the struggle that an artist has to go through to become a master of his art?

"I have certainly gone through struggles in my own life, and I would have to say that my artistic style has developed through my struggle in life. In fact my artworks are what are left as the footprints of the struggle I have experienced. "Difficulty is not always related to scarcity, sometimes it comes from abundance. Too much freedom may not help an artist to develop. It is the balance between the limitations that exist alongside the freedom that helps an artist to begin to form a style."

Art to you means...

"The arts are vital to our survival, because they elevate reproduction to the art of love, and they help us to bring kindness into the moments of our lives. We smile and laugh, we sigh and cry and whisper thank you to our hearts for shining the light of love on these moments of grace. Through the arts, we smile; we cry; we laugh; and we feel it all as the shining lights of love within our hearts, which brings beauty to how we live."

Your greatest influences in life...

"The people who have greatly influenced me have been my Sufi uncle, Rumi, Hafiz, William Blake, Gustave Moreau, Beethoven, and Kitaro. But perhaps the greatest of all influences has been my attraction to feminine beauty. It overwhelms me, and I feel like I am drowning in it."

The one who paints on my canvases follows his muse, not his intellect. That which influences me is not necessarily a means of expression, although I am attracted to every one of these. This is the essence of Fusionart for me that reflect in my paintings. It is a combination of all of these that create my paintings. My focus is not on the technical aspects of painting, but on the feelings emanating from my heart."

Your muse....

"My muse is to listen to the beloved within my own heart whispering the intimate secrets to me, allowing the virgin spring within my own heart to reveal its inner beauty, to share the wonder of pure love to every cell in my body. I let the eyes of my heart be the watchful vision that guides me to my wellness and wellbeing."

"Love is the alchemy that flows through us when we allow our heart to be the healer, the lover, the Friend, and the companion that watches over us. We open the gate to the garden of our beingness, and we open our hearts to the beloved that waits in our heart. When we do this, we are able to see others with the eyes of the heart and our glance can be a healing glance, a loving glance, a ray of light that helps others to see themselves as their



Song of Solitude

heart sees them. Love is the expanding path of growth and light that enlarges our vision. Mystics see by this light. When we play and create and feel the pleasurable state of having fun and feeling joy, the alchemy of love flows through our bodies. This is the chemistry that transforms us.

“Love will dissolve all that stands in the way of this healing and clear the way for joy. When we listen to our heart, we allow love to be the guiding force within our own life and we know that we don't have to go outside of ourselves to find it. We go within and learn the keys to release our own power to love. To follow the muse, I open my heart and let love make me new every day of my life, and in the highest and purest state, love will make me new every moment. This becomes the renaissance and the renewal of art.”

Your advice to the younger generation of artists...

“Being an artist is not about having a certain job or employment. It is about loving what we do without any attachment to the result. Every artist wants to be known and prosper from their art, but, just like every other endeavor, developing as an artist has certain guidelines to follow. Every one of these guidelines has to be followed diligently if you want to be successful in the art world:

1. Observation!

Observation for the artist has to do with seeing in bewilderment instead of through rational selection of what is useful to you or not. Observe and pay attention to what connects with the heart and not the mind. Do not look for what is connected to your rational needs, but with what awakens and excites your seeing.

2. Practice!

Keep on painting, not just to make a painting, but for the sake of the expression of it. Don't practice in order to make a business of art. Certainly it may be a blessing if someone wants to buy a painting, but this should not be your intention. Many times I ask my learners to paint just for burning the artwork. This frees them from trying to make a work of art and allows them to enjoy the process. Many are not able to see how deeply we are prepared for this.

3. Perseverance!

Don't let go. Don't give up. Persevere! The great mystic, Hafiz, talks about reaching for the tip of the hair of the beloved, which is his metaphoric language for the path to success. The hair of the beloved has curls, which go up and down and lead us on the path to triumph. Do not drop your connection with the beloved's hair as you enter a dark period in your life. There is always midnight before the dawn. The dark side of life is a major part of helping to develop our creative abilities.

4. Generosity!

Give back! Be generous with what you receive. If you have a talent or a desire to play and express in the way you most like to play, you will have no trouble playing once you have received that bliss. It is most important to share that and return it to the community. When you do this, you will receive the rest of the gift. It will keep on giving.

Just like the trees, our creative ability is for the benefit of others. We create to put it out for others to benefit from it as our pay back! We get much more in return when we do this. A mystic said, do virtuous deed and throw it in the flow of the river,

and see how you will receive it in the wilderness. The gift is not for us alone. We give back, not to receive, but because more joy comes our way when we do. This is what it means to be master of our art.

5. Love what you are doing!

This is the most important criteria for success. Don't even think of doing something if you do not love what you are doing. To be a master of your art is not simply to develop it in an unusual or unique way, but it is about doing what you love.

We need to live as an artwork, not try to do it. Beethoven was totally deaf, when he created his ninth symphony. It was not about his hearing the music, he became the music. When Rembrandt fell on the steps of the meat market and died out of malnutrition, it was because he had just given his last pennies to buy a certain colour he felt he needed to finish his painting. This is the love energy that makes someone master of his art.

THE RETREAT

Rassouli will be hosting a three-day creativity retreat from Jan. 19 to Jan. 21 at the Omani Society For Fine Arts, Shatti Al Qurum. The retreat offers the unique opportunity to gather for an extended time to share the energy of creating as a group. This unique event will combine instructor-led discussions about the creative process, and how to open up to your inner creator. The retreat will include specific exercises to assist you in living a creative life.

Pre-registration is required. Hence please e-mail dia@baitmuznagallery.com