



FINALIST in the Challenge No. 56 Flowers and Gardens competition
CAROL FRANCES, Connecticut, USA, *My Story*, oil, 12 x 12" (30 x 30cm)

INSPIRATION

Extravagant patterns of antique text and the shimmer of gold leaf – marry these together with a well rendered subject and oh my! Sometimes I can't explain just how the complicated chemistry of a successful painting comes together.

I'm like a child at the candy counter when it comes to colors and designs. I crave visual excitement and am lured to my studio by a desire to explore the possibilities for artistic expression and meaning in my mix of abstract and narrative ingredients. Gustav Klimt must have felt the same way as he conjured his sublime paintings from the same bold elements.

Individually, these materials are beautiful. But when combined into richly layered backgrounds their warm associations, metaphoric depth, and often divergent qualities allow me to cultivate the multiple meanings inherent in my work – a stage set for revealing the simple subject that finishes the story.

I love the metaphoric meaning and poetic potential of simple objects. I suppose that's why I'm called a symbolic realist. I continually wrestle with imagery that resonates with the hopes and challenges in my life. The result, which may appear as merely decorative, is in fact, a complex and multi-layered story that has been evolving across the years and unfolding through dozens of paintings – "My Story."

DESIGN

I wander through my paintings . . . sometimes for hours. Rarely do I begin with a pre-visible destination – just anticipation as I wait for the right combination of elements to catalyze. At all stages of construction I add, edit and delete. I rotate the board, scratch through layers and often use my favorite power tool, the orbital sander. I reward myself with potato chips if I hang in there during all this exploration and experimentation.

When the composition and background express my intention, I decide on size and placement of my key image. Depending on the complexity of the background, I will decide how many other images are needed for compositional balance and for the telling of my story.

PROCESS

Ah, the process! My studio is like a laboratory, filled with experimental boards, materials and tools. Some paintings I started and set aside, many are actively underway. A piece will often begin with an existing but resistant painting whose time of surrender has finally come. Another painting might be built on the few promising parts of a piece that mostly didn't work. I find this approach much less intimidating than starting from a blank board. These pre-existing paintings have proven to be terrific bases. "My Story" began this way, on an old work that seemed worth revisiting.

I use stencils and photo transfer to add and enhance patterns and text. The lavish French script that drifts across "My Story" was transferred from a page I discovered in a cache of old family papers – a beautiful work of art in itself as well as an actual piece of my history. I apply gold leaf, oxidizing it with rags soaked in vinegar. The organic patterning that results is always a surprise and frequently sends me in a completely different direction than I had originally intended.

The final layer of my painting is the crown jewel: a highly realistic key image that I carefully render in oils and which metaphorically conveys the meaning of the piece.

CONTACT DETAILS

Email: carol@carolfrances.com

Web site: www.carolfrances.com