

## **Art and Hope at the End of the Tunnel**

The world as we know it has dramatically changed over the last eighteen months and everything including the art scene, slowed to a near halt. It's been difficult to think about anything positive while we were going through hell with political drama and a pandemic that upended our lives. But lucky me, here in our City of Angels, I was still able to visit artists' studios, and even had access to some museum and gallery exhibitions.

Talking to the artists, I asked, "How has this difficult time affected your art making?" Much to my surprise and delight, the response I got from them was that the pandemic, with its lockdown, allowed them to spend more uninterrupted time in their studio than ever before. As a result, the artworks they created during this time had a new focus and deeper meaning.

All the above made me think about the well-known saying, "Complaining is easy but doing something about it is hard." Dramatic and even tragic events in our lives can sometimes inspire the creation of great works of art. Leo Tolstoy would not have written his famous novel, *War and Peace*, without Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. Picasso would not have painted his famous, *Guernica*, without the tragic bombing of the city of Guernica in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. Another example is Frida Kahlo whose body, at the age of 18, was crushed in a horrible bus accident. The excruciating pain from that accident along with multiple surgeries and recoveries became the inspiration for her irresistible dark and moody paintings.

Let's think for a moment about roses, which we admire for their aroma and beauty. What do gardeners put in the soil to make those roses so beautiful, so enjoyable? Honey or horse manure? Well . . . you know the answer to that one.

Last year, when I was approached by the USC Fisher Museum of Art with the suggestion to curate an exhibition showcasing works by Los Angeles-based artists created during the pandemic, I thought about the acclaimed novel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Love in The Time of Cholera*, as inspiration. That's why I initially decided to title the exhibition, *Art in the Time of Pandemic*, but after speaking with artists across the city and seeing their engaging works in progress, I was moved by their continued commitment to their artistic practice. What I witnessed and experienced gave me hope that everything can and will get better, and that there is light at the end of the tunnel. As a result, I thought a better title for the exhibition would be, *Art and Hope at the End of the Tunnel*.

Looking at the list of artists chosen for this exhibition, I see among them men and women, people of color and of diverse ethnicities, as well as members of the LGBTQ community. I swear I was not trying to be politically correct in the choices that I made. It happened naturally, intuitively. Los Angeles has always been and continues to be the home for people from four corners of the world. I learned about that 40 years ago soon after I emigrated from the Soviet

Union to the United States. I recall sitting in a café with a small group of Angelenos talking about an interesting art project. There were four of us. Two women—one from Argentina, another from Israel. And two men—one from Czechoslovakia, and myself, from Russia. All of us spoke

English with strong foreign accents. I remember joking then that the heaviness of our accents might be one of the reasons for Los Angeles' earthquakes. Now, earthquakes and a pandemic aside, let's talk about the artists and their works selected for this exhibition.

There is no way to capture in one exhibition the essence of Los Angeles' ever-expanding art scene with its thousands of artists and growing list of museums and galleries. In "normal" times, I would probably try to present a less personal, more detached view of the LA art scene, but for this exhibition I chose the artists whose work I was able to see despite the restrictions and limitations we all experienced during the pandemic. The selected artworks celebrate the artists' ability not only to adapt, but to thrive.

-Edward Goldman, Curator