



Alice Zinnes:

**An Instagram Feature Interview in Seven Parts
@66_Studios, February - March, 2022**

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E66 Studios brings you a short in-depth series into the life of Alice Zinnes.

Artist Statement:

Dreams. For me, making art is dreaming, being open, allowing forms, space and light to flow slowly through me, like the absorption of oil into cloth. Not illustrations or literal translations, my art transforms ancient myths to mysterious worlds where the boundaries between underworld and waking earth are traversable, terror coexists with joy, and loss yields to renewal. My art pieces, inspired by poetry, fiction and most recently mythology are quiet landscape narratives in the guise of abstract explorations. Emotional tensions are transformed into forms emerging from light and dark, suggestions of figures in space. Beginning with myths, I hope to create epic spaces where the world at its least understandable is made concrete.

I have been at the center of the anti-fracking movement since 2008, and though lyrical and semi-abstract, my art indirectly relates to my environmentalism. Commercialism has turned our humanity into a deadly pastiche of plastic emotions. We buy to camouflage our alienation, uncontrollably burning fossil fuels that threaten our very existence. Through its lyricism my art asks that we value our inner selves over external belongings, people over objects, and our planet's life over personal greed.

For years I painted the landscape of rural northeastern Pennsylvania, and that landscape space is in my bones and blood. Now, rather than suggesting the light and space of an actual motif, my landscapes are cast deep in the rich colors of myth and poetry – the language and pictures we create to understand the world at its least understandable.



Origins:

E66 Studios: “What led you to pursue an artistic life?”

AZ: “Both of my parents loved art. My mother, the poet Harriet Zinnes, had two sets of friends: writers and artists, and so I always knew art could be a profession. Above our wall-to-wall bookcases was a salon-style art exhibition. I loved a sepia drawing by Nell Blaine, given by the artist to my parents as a wedding gift, and have often thought that this wash drawing inspired me to be an artist. I also loved Pollock’s *One, Number 1* (1950) which I saw around age 10 when I took art classes at MOMA. To me the painting was the whole solar system, wandering infinitely to a vast universe of what I couldn’t say, though I knew it was magical. And an old-school Austrian art teacher declared when I was about 12, “No one will ever need to teach Alice anything about color,” a clear exaggeration repeated so many times by my family that at least I was persuaded I loved color.

“But I was interested in math (my father was a physicist) and went to college to be an environmentalist. For a freshman-year art history course I copied a Jan Steen painting, and surprisingly was transported into another world where only the Steen, my pencil and paper existed. When done, I was amazed my drawing looked like the painting. I was hooked, but not yet on the path to being a painter. Instead, I majored in art history.

It was the contrasting experiences as an intern at the Guggenheim Museum the summer of my junior year, and art classes I took the following summer at Queens College that finally convinced me I had no other choice but to pursue art. Art history was interesting, but making art was centering and gave meaning to my life.”

Artwork:

Title: *Two Figures*

Medium: Oil on canvas

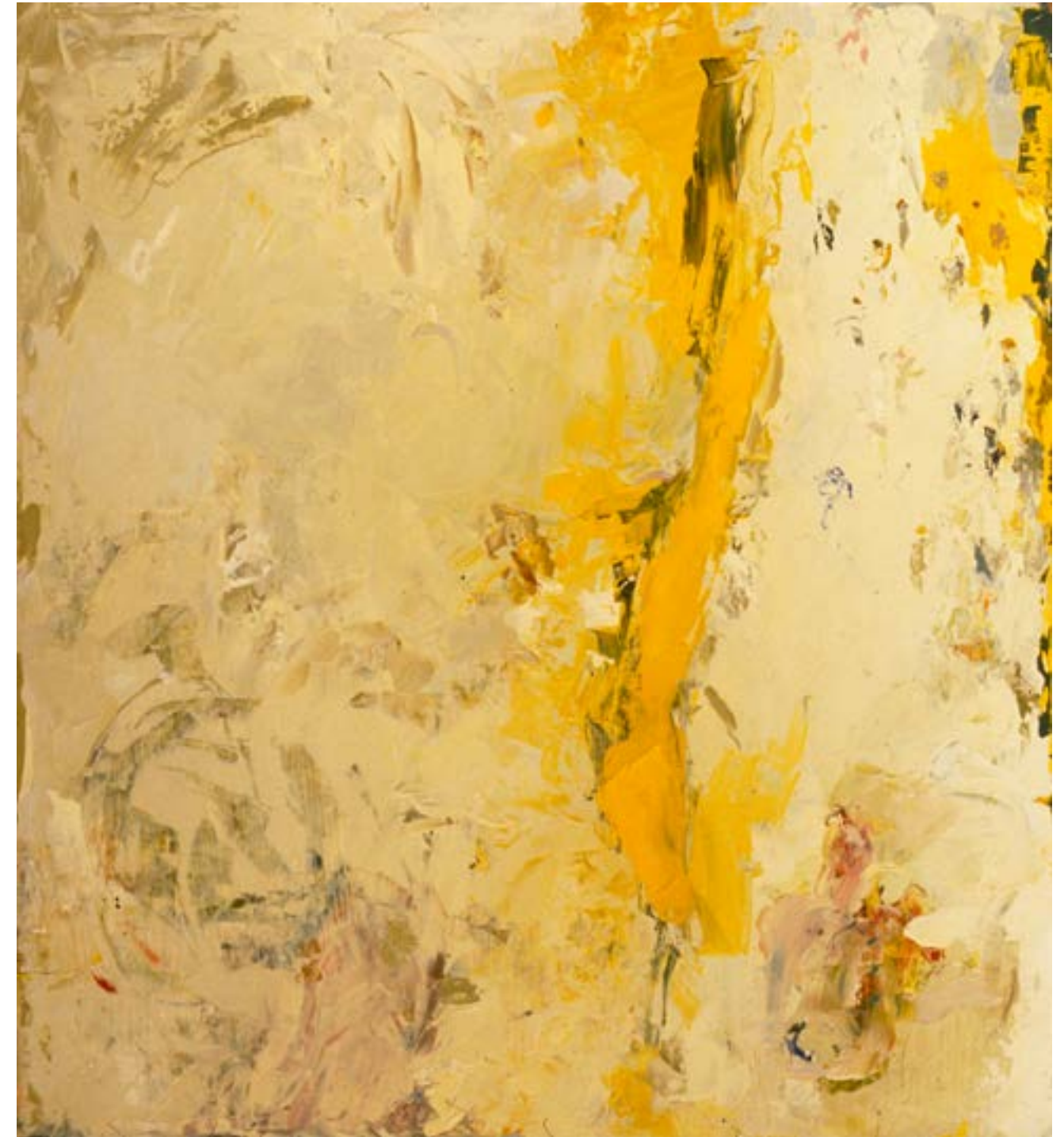
Size: 34 x 38 inches



Turning Point:

E66 Studios: “Is there a specific Artwork or period where your Art evolved into the style that your now know for?”

AZ: “At the NY Studio School I worked from observation, emulating Cezanne, Giacometti, Matisse, Pollock. For years after graduate school, painting landscapes and silk flowers, I continued my perceptual studies, though my art was lyrical and quite abstract. Throughout, there were a few glimpses to something else – a strange painting of metaphoric memories done from a George McNeil still life of junk, a black & white feverishly painted narrative made in graduate school, small watercolors about recent personal events – but I never took these seriously... until after a large one-person show of my observational work. The flood of complements confused me. How could I now push these paintings further? It turned out I couldn't. They were done. Suddenly the watercolor experiments took over, first inspired by recent events, then distant childhood ones. I'd jump awake from a deep sleep to paint a few marks. I was transfixed. But translating my excitement into oil eluded me. After about 1.5 years of horrendous, tortured painting, desperately trying to believe in myself despite the obvious failures, I finally made one painting I thought could be called a painting: *Underground Passage* was inspired by a transfer station in the NYC subway.”



Artwork:

The Woods Live Here, oil on canvas, 38 x 44 inches

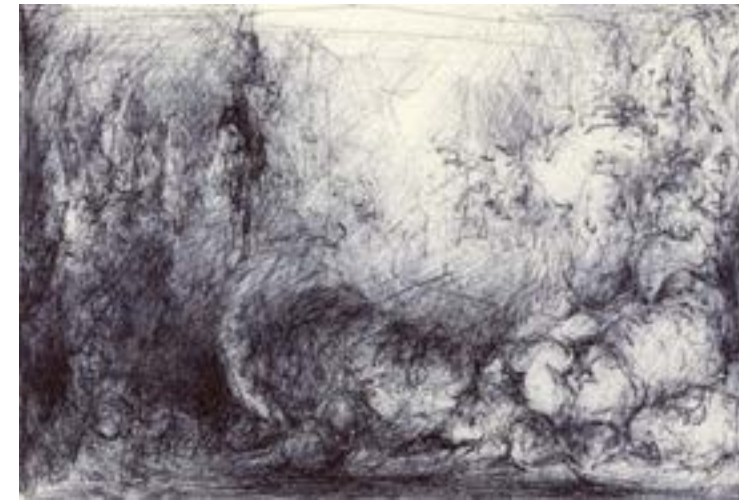
Underground Passage, oil on board, 31 ½ x 29 inches

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Art Practice:

E66 Studios: “Can you tell me about the process that led to the creation *Loss of The Past*? Am I correct in saying this work belongs to your most recent series *The Mythic Paintings*?”

Alice Zinnes: “Generally, my Art responds to an emotional drama within something I have read. For *Loss of The Past*, it was Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. I try to visualize the light and space that emotes this drama, blending it with the objects, people and landscape described in the original narrative. This visualization, however, is at first vague, and also fleeting. I therefore make drawings and watercolors to help discover the painterly world I am searching for. Nevertheless, the drawings and watercolors are not preparatory studies. Rather, they are worlds of discovery and exploration, and often look quite different from each other and the final oil painting. Sometimes the painting actually informs the smaller work, which might be worked on simultaneously with the oils. Also, because my oils take a long time to make – months and even years sometimes – the drawings and watercolors help remind me of my intentions. Ultimately, my process is mysterious to me. I read, imagine, go deep within my memories, experiences and dreams, create a visualization, begin working on my Art. This beginning then re-informs my initial intent, which itself creates new images and new emotional metaphors, continuing as a circular and meandering interchange until the artwork is complete.



Artwork:

(These drawings were made in conjunction with *Loss of The Past*.)

Loss of The Past, oil on canvas, 30 x 38 inches

Drawings: *It Can't Be*, pen & ink on paper, 3 1/4 x 5 inches

Too Late, pen & ink on paper, 3 1/3 x 4 1/2 inches

The Forbidden Dream, charcoal on tinted archival paper, 23 1/2 x 35 inches

Color:

E66 Studios: “How did you approach the color selection for *Returned*?”

AZ: “Although I’m not technically synesthetic, I do see emotions as colors and light. Before starting a painting, I visualize its colors and experiment on my palette with various color relationships. Despite these preparations, sometimes the painting chooses the colors as it evolves. Originally, I had thought *Returned* would be more colorful. I worked on it for a very long time – perhaps I should say I “struggled” with it a very long time. One night, long after I should have been sleeping, in a frenzy I hacked away at the painting, and these final colors emerged. I thought I’d destroyed the painting, but when I looked the next day, I realized it almost was done.”

Painting:

Returned, oil on canvas, 36 x 44 inches

Drawing:

Silent Whispers, charcoal on tinted paper, 27 ½ x 35 inches



Art Practice:

E66 Studios: *Us Despite Them* is a very compelling painting. Can you give some insight into its creation?”

Alice Zinnes: *Us Despite Them* grew out of a story within *The Golden Ass*, our only extant ancient Roman novel, by Apuleius. Its main character has been turned into an ass, and as such is mistreated by its many owners, but also privy to revealing private conversations that it relates in a biting and caustic critique. I was drawn to the novel’s absurdity, its serious humor, sad pathos, social commentary, and ultimately its impassioned images of human relations surviving within a world of conniving, mistrust, yearning and even love.”

Painting:

Us Despite Them, oil on canvas, 36 x 44 inches

Drawings:

Hoping Within The Whirlwind, charcoal on tinted paper, 27 ½ x 35 inches

Together for The End, pen & ink on paper, 3 3/8 x 4 5/8 inches



Current Events & Future:

E66 Studios: “What are you currently working on in the studio, and where do you see yourself going in the future?”

AZ: “Some months ago, I received an Artist Call for work related to *Genesis*. Since I’d never approached these stories, I decided to paint two watercolors from the Old Testament, thinking my interest would stop there. However, I was surprised to discover a fascination that inspired me to make two charcoals and eventually the oil painting I’m now working on – and a second one I will begin soon. After that? I can’t look that far ahead.

Nevertheless, the war in Ukraine, along with the existential crisis of climate change, are so frightening that I suspect they will subconsciously inform the painterly narratives of upcoming work. Though my Art is not overtly political, my intense involvement in the environmental movement has shown me how closely my two passions, art and saving life on this planet, relate. Art grows out of life, and as such cannot be divorced from external realities. But art also can give a needed respite from external crises.

It can give expression to our deepest fears and hopes, and as such, even give us strength to continue. Bringing us to our inner selves is what I wish my Art might do.

Here are the watercolors and charcoals connected to my *Genesis* explorations. *To Be* (drawing) and *The Fall* (watercolor) relate to one story, and *I Am* (drawing) and *Cry from Within Without* (watercolor) relate to the other. *Only Cry from Within Without* is finished.

Through March 16, one of my oils is on view at Carter Burden Gallery.”
(548 W.28th St. #534, NYC)

Images:

Cry from Within Without (watercolor on archival paper), 7 1/2 x 11 inches

To Be (charcoal on tinted paper), 27 1/2 x 38 inches

I Am, (charcoal on tinted paper), 27 1/2 x 34 12 inches

The Fall (watercolor on archival paper), 7 1/2 x 11 inches (early and finished versions)

