

Oil on the ocean waves – cruising with a canvas!

Jameel Arif

Suzanne LaFleur

started drawing and painting as a small child. She grew up in a family which lived very near the sea in a small town called Southampton, known more famously as "The Hamptons". A town favoured by the artistic fraternity, Jackson Pollack and William DeKooning are just a couple of the artists who painted and had their studios there. It was in such a creative and inspiring environment that Suzanne developed the deep sense of love for nature, as well as a strong connection to the arts, that she later brought with her to the Middle East. Having now returned to the USA and making her home in New York, Suzanne was delighted to grant CityPages an exclusive interview in which she exudes her love of art and enthuses about her next exciting project...

☞ Did you have formal training, or are you a self taught artist?

I would say I combine both. My formal training (at the Art Students League in New York City) was only a part of my art education. Equally important were my frequent visits to museums and galleries, studying the work of other artists through books and then undertaking my own experimentation. All these factors continue to have a significant influence on my work, and my artistic process seems to evolve as my life experience grows.

☞ What more can you tell us about the Art Students League?

The Art Students League in New York City was founded in 1875 by artists, and for artists. Luminaries such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Mark Rothko, and Robert Rauschenberg are among the great artists who have studied and taught there.

My education at this venerable institution helped me to develop my own artistic vision, and I also learned the technical skills which I incorporate in my painting process.

☞ What medium do you use primarily?

Oil paint is my favourite medium. Most of the old masters worked in oil, and its inherent durability and non-fading quality have allowed their works to be preserved for centuries. I also work with pastels and charcoal.

☞ Where have you exhibited so far?

I actually started exhibiting my work in Kuwait, showing my work in places such as Illusion Gallery, Bayt Lothan, the Sheraton, the French Embassy and at the Al Thuraya Complex. I have also held exhibitions in Lebanon, France, and New York City. Most recently my work has been on display in New York City at the Coleman Burke Gallery in Chelsea, and in Cipriani on Wall Street. There has also been an art exhibition affiliated with Google; a Credit Suisse curated event; and a fund raiser for cancer research through New York University.

☞ Do you outline in pencil before you begin your painting?

Rarely. My process is to go directly to the surface of the canvas. I draw upon my conscious and subconscious memory to create images that reflect my life experience.

☞ What major things have you noticed about your own work as you have progressed?



Residing in Kuwait, Lebanon and the south of France for the past 20 years greatly influenced the progression of my work as an artist. A richness of intensity indicated by broader strokes and vibrant colours has evolved as a result of emotions evoked by my physical environment. The cultural diversity of New York City has helped me to further expand my artistic palate in new directions.

☞ What would you recommend to someone who thinks they cannot draw or paint?

There is a wonderful book called "Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain". It supports my belief that we can all draw, and are all innately artistic.

☞ A lot of artists like to work at night - when is your favourite time to work?



There is no particular time of the day... I work when I feel inspired, and that could be at any time. When I am inspired I can go on working for hours and hours, as I lose all sense of time.

☞ Do you try to convey messages through your paintings?

My art is an expression of personal experiences and emotions that I want to share with people. My message is that we can all understand each other and the human condition better through art. Art is truly the universal language.

☞ Do you work with any specific styles or subject matter?

I am a contemporary abstract painter. My subconscious memories of people and places are portrayed through my work.

☞ Which artists have influenced you?

The impressionists, such as Renoir and Monet, have had a great influence on my work. Spending a great deal of time in Europe, I visited the art studios of Renoir and Monet many times, including visits to Monet's Giverny Gardens. The way these artists captured the

light of this region is astonishing to me. I also study the techniques of the Old Masters, such as Rembrandt and Valesquez.

☞ Have you any incomplete paintings?

Yes, I always have at least one incomplete painting, and sometimes I have several at once. Sometimes, I find myself working for months on a single piece until I reach the result that I want. At times, I feel as if I am in a battle with the canvas!

☞ How do you get ideas to create a piece? What inspires you?

My ideas come to me through many sources. I could be walking in a beautiful garden, or even have a memory that could be the start of a new painting. I am mostly inspired by nature and its abundant colours. New environments and the changing seasons also inspire me.

☞ You are about to embark on a new project - an exhibition at sea. What more can you tell us about it?

I am honoured to have been offered a solo exhibition aboard The Silver Spirit, which is the newest luxury ship in the famous Silver Seas cruise line. We will

depart from Rome on August 20th on a one week art cruise, travelling to different ports in Italy and Croatia, finally docking in Venice on August 27th. I am also honoured to collaborate with a wonderful non-profit art organization called "Arts Horizons." Their mission is to transform the lives of children through the power of the arts, and our cruise is a fund raiser to support their noble cause.





☞ **Do you have any websites you would like to share?**

Actually, there are a few websites that may interest readers. My personal art website is www.SuzanneLaFleur.Org at which anyone can view my works of art, my biography and other information about my work. There's also a link there to get information about the Art Cruise and exhibition in August.

I also encourage people to visit the Arts Horizons website at www.ArtsHorizons.org as they do amazing work, enriching lives of children through the arts.

And if anyone wants to find out more about the art cruise in August, they can visit <http://lipserve.com/lafleur/index.html>. The email for art cruise information is sales@alicetravel.com. By phone, it's 1 973 439 1700

☞ **How can someone buy one of your paintings?**

Firstly, I welcome everyone who is interested in my paintings to contact me - even if you are not planning to acquire one. I enjoy discussing my work, answering questions and talking about art in general! I can be contacted through my website www.SuzanneLaFleur.org or by email at Suzanne@SuzanneLaFleur.org

☞ **What words of advice would you give to beginner artists?**

Follow your heart and never give up!

☞ **Do you have a message for the people (and your friends) in Kuwait?**

Kuwait will always have a warm place in my heart and I will always feel at home there. I thank all of my friends and the Kuwaiti people for their unending support. I hope to return soon!

☞ **Finally, what message do you have for us at CityPages?**

I would like to thank you for taking such an interest in my work and in my story. And an especially big "thank you" for being so supportive of the arts in general!

☞ **Have you received any awards during your exhibitions in Kuwait and Lebanon?**

My exhibitions in Kuwait and Lebanon were well reviewed by the local and international media, which is reward in itself! But I was formally honoured by the Lincoln Center Visual Arts Director, Tom Lollar, who spoke about my work at a recent exhibition. And a couple of months ago I received the honour of Membership to the Venerable National Arts Club.

☞ **What are your future goals or plans?**

Of course, I will be delighted if lots of people join me on the upcoming art cruise this August! I'll be giving art demonstrations on board, as well as leading art excursions to places we visit. It should be quite an adventure!

Another goal is to be offered an exhibition at the Kuwait Museum of Modern Art. I have been there many times, and consider it to be a gem of a museum.

Ultimately, I hope that my work will be a source of inspiration for many. If my paintings encourage people to take an inner journey into their own lives and memory, I will have succeeded. I would also be very happy if my work encourages other people to discover and pursue their own artistic dreams.

☞ **What do you hope the viewer will take away from your paintings?**

I hope to capture a viewer's imagination. You may have noticed that I do not title my paintings - this is because I like my work to provide an unbiased canvas through which viewers can associate with their own life memories.

☞ **How long does it take to complete a painting? Which of your works took the most time and effort, and why?**

A painting seemingly takes a life time; I struggle with each and every one of them. Knowing when a painting is done is still a process of discovery for me.

