

COMMUNITY PERSONALITY

Catch and Release: The paintings of Lil Chrzan

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Lil Chrzan's work begins early each day in her studio in Horseshoe Bay, a contained loft space with a peaked roof, a plank-wood and paint-spattered floor, and filled with the jumble of works in progress, canvases leaning on the walls, sketches and photographs pinned above them, wire-mesh drawers spilling with tubes of oil paint, the entire space permeated with the pungent smell of turpentine. The studio is in a separate building behind her home, looking out on the bustling community and crowded marina nestled next to the ocean and beneath a dramatic corridor of steep-sided mountains.

Having grown up in Toronto, she was immediately taken with this location on her arrival in Vancouver. She had always been drawn to nature and takes full advantage of the wildness found on the West Coast through hiking and camping trips. As a teenager she read the works of Henry David Thoreau, an early inspiration for the freedom found in nature. In fact, she was so inspired

by Thoreau's writing that she hand-sewed the initials "H.D.T." on her clothes, a secret talisman of a way of life she hoped to find, at least it was secret until a friend noticed the initials and thought it read "H.O.T." Lil pursued a career as a nurse and then, after moving to the West Coast, enrolled in the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in the 1980s, graduating with honours. Her influences would now extend to the Luminists, the American landscape artists from the same period as Thoreau, the mid- to late-1800s. She would also find inspiration in the work of Mark Tobey and Morris Graves, both of whom worked in Abstract Expressionism, their artistic pursuits distinguished by the influence of Asian philosophy and mysticism, leading to the label of "mystical painting." A suggestion of inner reflection also appears in the titles that she gives her paintings. The titles come to her during the work, as if the painting had named itself, sometimes as matter of fact – "Late October," "Fall Evening on the Chuckanut" - and sometimes poetic – "The Lake had a Cloud in her Lap," "As if the World held its Breath."

She paints every day and usually works on three paintings at a time, each in a differ-



Rubinoff's Rhapsody 36x48 oil on canvas 2014.

Photo: Courtesy Lil Chrzan

ent stage of development. Each work begins with an experience of the moment in nature, sometimes captured in a photographic likeness, sometimes rendered as a sketch. Lil still possesses the first photograph she took of the

bay, never dreaming that she would one day live here, as she has for the past two decades. Lil has a solo show coming up in May in Vancouver, and is participating in the 4th annual Horseshoe Bay Artwalk in July. 🍷