

JULIE PÜTTGEN

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I've been drawing and painting my whole life - and part of the joy of this is that I keep finding out about new ways to build pictorial space, new materials I've never tried, and new images I've never seen. This process of discovery is sparked as much by research for my own paintings as by my role as a college art professor - I am always looking for new ways to think about what painting is & new ways to approach doing it.

A few years ago, I made *Cloudmapping*, a group of twenty-four small paintings on paper that went much further into storytelling than I had ever gone before. The intense pleasure of rendering the fantastical creatures and landscapes of that series came as a surprise to me after years of non-representational painting and conceptual installation work. I also noticed how much people seemed to enjoy looking at these paintings and thinking about the stories implied within them. The *Cloudmapping* paintings became the nucleus of *Unless & Until*, a collaboration with JS van Buskirk, a writer; Jim Carlson, a composer; and Matt Gilbert, an animator. Thanks to that project, my appreciation for the power of narrative in painting grew and deepened.

I began thinking about *generosity* as a key component in the relationship between artists and viewers. From the artist's perspective, it seems to me that generosity means really offering viewers something worth seeing, and making an effort to communicate a shared situation in earnest. The situation could be a form of laughter, or suffering, or common history - it doesn't really matter, as long as the intention is to invite the viewer in as a guest. From the viewer's perspective, generosity - I think - means taking the time to look deeply, and making the effort to understand the nature of the situation proposed by the artist.

In the summer of 2009, still thinking about painted narratives, fantastical creatures, and the possibilities of shared visual experience, I traveled to Ladakh (in the Indian Himalayas) with my husband to research animal imagery in Buddhist monasteries' mural paintings. As visual spaces, each of the monasteries we walked to embodied the ideals of generosity I'd been struggling to articulate. The paintings' beauty offered immediate sensory pleasure, and as well as an invitation to study and understand the Buddha's teachings. Through a monk I met at Lamayuru, I found Lama Yeshe Jamyang, a monk & master-painter in Leh, who introduced me to the basics of iconometric thangka drawing.

I decided I wanted to devote part of my current sabbatical year to studying thangka painting. This decision was based on my love of pattern & flat color; on my interest in the wisdom narratives of Himalayan Buddhist art; and on my desire to learn more about how thangka paintings are produced and commissioned. I found the Thangde Gatsal Studio and agreed on a period of study with Master Lobsang (Lochoe) Choegyal in Dharamsala, India.

Meanwhile, some friends invited me to make a ketubah painting for their wedding. I had never before produced a piece of commissioned sacred art, and I found I loved it. The "shared situation" I had thought about earlier in my reflections on generosity became a specific occasion - a communal celebration of the union of two people. In this case - as in the case of a commissioned thangka painting - my skills were deployed in the service of blessing and commemorating an important passage in my clients' lives.

I am not sure yet what will come of the time I spent studying at Thangde Gatsal. I learned a lot about traditional processes and materials of thangka painting, and completed my own Green Tara. It is likely that I'll choose to engage in formal study of Tibetan painting again in the future. For now, I want to use what I learned to deepen my own idiomatic practice of narrative painting, as in my current *Rider Diptychs* series (<http://www.turtlenosedsnake.com/diptych.htm>). I also look forward in the near future to returning to my roots in community-based works like the *100 Names Project* (<http://www.turtlenosedsnake.com/100names.htm>) and *Becoming Aware of a Paradox in Nurture* (<http://www.turtlenosedsnake.com/bapn.htm>).

My online, annotated Portfolio is here: <http://turtlenosedsnake.com/portfolio.htm>