

Concord artist discovers her course to creativity

By JANE Q. CANTU

"...creativity is the most basic manifestation of a man or woman fulfilling his or her own being in the world." Rollo May, *The Courage to Create*, 1975

There is a lot of talk, these days, about becoming creative. But significant creativity never sprang from talk. Being authentically creative requires intense solitude and submersion of self in a sea of daily doing. It means self-directed exposure to the elements of a chosen form. It calls for risking one's self in relationships with other human beings in the hope that meaning will result. The prospect on the horizon? A lifelong process, not devoid of tempest.

Every artist sails an uncharted sea, often as hard to fathom from the inside as out. Society's god, "commercial value" and William James', "bitch goddess success" together can lead the artist away from creativity for its own sake. No wonder artists often rebel against society, shaking the status quo with their efforts to reveal some new reality. Until recently this was not an image that appealed to many women. Even today, painters generally, and women particularly, can be awash with choices and confusion about their role in the art world. However, creative women seem no longer reluctant to invest their talent and potential.

Last May, Concord resident Nan Wezniak completed training at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School, after making a full commitment three years earlier to the normally four-year course. Wezniak is one of many women across the nation who are coming in touch with the reality of their own existence and what that can bring in terms of personal happiness and participation in forming the future. As Wezniak says it: "Women are coming out of the closet."

The Concord Art Association awarded Wezniak its top prize for painting on February 4, at the opening of its annual Members' Juried Art Show. Her watercolor titled, "In the Greenhouse" was a featured work in the gallery of the Art Association on Lexington Road, during that show. Naturally, this pleased Wezniak. However, she is keeping the bloom of success in its place. "For me, art is not a product, it is a process," she says. One which she is now living

had without getting hung up on my age (then 37) my immense shyness, or my fear of failure and ridicule. So I tried to start fresh, attitudes and all," Wezniak says, "and stop worrying about comparisons - period."

Nan believes her success lies in, "developing the staying power against everyday defeats and discouragements," to enable her simply to do her art. The Museum School was a great help. Wezniak calls it, "the most freeing experience of my life."

"You have to believe that what you are doing is absolutely necessary." Joel Meyerowitz, photographer, Museum School commencement address, 1978

After graduation last spring, Wezniak's family wondered what was next. "Now that you're finished with art school are you coming home?" they asked. Home, she finds; is nice but not enough. To her it was very important to find a studio in Boston, near her new sphere of activity and her colleagues in the metropolitan art world. Fortunately, her family helped her find a large studio in the heart of the city, and she spends five days a week at work. Home is for evenings and weekends, as it is for the other family members.

"My creativity now stems from a desire to reach beyond myself." She mentions a wish: "to leave some kind of record that will live after me - the common quest for a bit of immortality, I guess." She adds, "I am not preoccupied by death, but I do think about it, and I want to leave something that speaks of life. Life is a gift I greatly enjoy."

Asked if anger plays any role in her work now, Wezniak says that when she gained some confidence in her work, her rage was directed more at "condescending suburban-housewife-artist attitudes," which no longer bother her. "Anger does not dominate me inside, and my art is not about that."

Having recently "had to find out what art since 1945 is all about," Wezniak is especially good at sharing her knowledge. She enjoys talking to individuals and groups about what's going on in the art world. She feels lucky to have become involved when she did, and recalls one older woman who, after hearing her talk, told her, "You are doing exactly what we always wanted



Concord artist, Nan Wezniak. (Cantu photo)

ually. "My work is 90% for me and 10% for a hopefully receptive audience," Nan says cheerfully. Unlike many involved in creative art, Wezniak is willing and able to be informative and open about how she arrived at that very personal process. In fact, she takes joy in telling what it means to her, where the journey began, and where it appears to be leading.

"The first step is the hardest." Voltaire

"I have always been intense and driving," Wezniak confides. It was when she, "began to meet others and was surprised to find they feel the same way," that she felt more at ease pursuing her determination. She mentions "restrictions" she had begun to feel in her life. With three youngsters, now all in school, she says, "I was champing at the bit to get out. But I wanted it all: my family, our happiness, and my art. So I waited 'til Douglas (the youngest) was in first grade. What was a serious interest 6 1/2 years ago is now a real commitment."

Wezniak describes her addiction to creativity. "It's like jogging for some. If I go more than a few days without working in my studio, I become unhappy. I don't even feel well." Devoted to her work, she is also an accomplished tennis and squash player, "for comic relief."

The onset of her life in art was delayed but sudden. Wezniak, a 1959 Wellesley graduate with a degree in French and a Stanford M.A. in education, woke up one morning three years ago in her sparkling contemporary house, and realized she had never been in an environment where she could test her limits. "Everyone reaches maturity with certain expectations for herself, and everyone has limits." But Wezniak began to feel "an inner rage at my own ineptitude," she says. "I hated most of my own painting of the past ten years." She concluded she had been dabbling and says, "I decided to get tough on myself."

"Clearly, the greatest hardship I had was convincing myself that I should be allowed to take a full shot at developing whatever talent I

to do and couldn't." She finds many people have a hard time understanding art today. She likes to use artist Robert Motherwell's explanation to a confused member of a group she was in, "You have to remember, I've been on a 30 year journey," he told them.

Looking back on her childhood in Washington, D.C., Nan says her family background gives no hint of involvement in painting. "Except," she recalls, "my mother took me to the National Gallery once every week. I spent a lot of time looking and wondering." During her college junior year in Paris, she went often to the Louvre and watched. "It was at that time I became interested as a doer rather than an observer. but time goes by, and in those days, although I was competitive, I was afraid to put myself on the line."

Time does, indeed, go by and with it, fortunately, many fears. Today, Wezniak is moving ahead under full sail of creative canvas. Her work is in both oil and mixed media on paper. Two prestigious galleries have just accepted several of her pieces: Impressions, on Newbury St., Boston and Clark Gallery in Lincoln. Her first professional show was mounted last November at the Flagg Gallery in Jamaica Plain.

What has been her family's reaction to her involvement with art? "I could not have done this without my husband's support," Nan confides. "But he realizes the first 15 years of our marriage enabled him to achieve his goals, now it is my turn to make the most of this opportunity. He is pleased for me."

"My children (ages 10, 12 and 14) won't feel the restrictions I felt," Wezniak says happily. "They are used to seeing me go off on my own every day."

She is creating many things. Not the least is a climate of self-reliance and commitment - a valuable role-model for people growing up in era that expects equality and is concerned with a quest for creativity



Detail from "In the Greenhouse," watercolor by Nan Wezniak, which took top honors for painting in the Concord Art Association's recent Members' Art Show. (Cantu photo)