

happenings

Weston artist believes success is taking risks

By KATHERINE CROTEAU

WESTON — For many people their jobs are only a livelihood, but for artist and Weston resident Nan Wezniak, her job is her life.

After being a high school teacher and painting traditional watercolors for eight or 10 years in the early '70's, she said, she decided she would be an artist because her work up to this point had not been challenging or stimulating enough.

"I decided I would do it the way I wanted to do it or give up."

At this turning point Wezniak went to the Boston Museum School. She began doing watercolors of plants in a grid pattern, based on experiences she had working in a greenhouse.

While it was easy to sell the traditional work, Wezniak does not believe success as an artist is defined solely as selling paintings.

"I like to sell because it gives me a good feeling but it's not why I do the art. I am driven to do it. I would do it if I never sold anything."

A turning point

Three and one-half years ago Wezniak reached another turning point when she became very sick. After she got well her work changed. Instead of watercolors of plants and flowers, she began working in charcoal and in oil creating large-scale works. A painting done in 1985, "The Seven Pillars of Wisdom, is 72 by 144 inches. Much of her works are triptychs, paintings consisting of three separate panels but are hung together.

Her art now focuses on organic matter itself, such as plants or flowers, rather than on the object in its immediate environment. In her search for essential basic forms Wezniak scrutinizes a real

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ARTIST Nan Wezniak stands by one of her paintings, "Night Altar, a triptych, that hangs in her Weston Home. In April her work can be seen at the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln in an exhibition entitled "Drawings from Boston." It can also be seen presently in the Wiggins Gallery at the Boston Public Library in the exhibition "Works by Women." Katherine Croteau photo



Her artwork has grown

Artist Nan Wezniak (left) has switched from watercolors and found success working on a large scale, page 34.

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object and magnifies the form in her subconscious mind until the form comes out onto the canvas in an altered state. She said this whole process takes place in her head.

This "thinking time" is essential to Wezniak's art. "Art takes an enormous amount of time just being in the studio when it seems to the outside world that nothing is happening."

During some of this thinking time Wezniak performs some of the physical chores her art requires. She builds her own stretchers, photographs her own work, sorts slides, and buys art supplies, all the while thinking.

Residential fellowship

During the next month Wezniak is going to get a lot of time to think and work. She has received a fellowship in painting and drawing to the Vermont Studio Colony in Johnson, Vt. Seventeen artists are each given a studio and all their worldly needs are cared for so they can have an intense, sustained period of uninterrupted time in which to work, said Wezniak.

"The day to day tedious stuff that breaks up your wonderful creative time is taken off your back."

Wezniak says she can never get that type of uninterrupted time in her regular life but that being an artist requires discipline and the commitment to carving out the time. "Artists have to be disciplined. You don't have a boss or a regular paycheck. You're doing it because you love the process. It means you're dedicated to carving out the time no matter what."

Loves the process

The process of creating art and learning from it is part of what drives Wezniak to

paint. "The greatest joy of being an artist is continuing to learn, continuing to explore new ideas, continuing to take chances and not letting yourself fall into an easy way of painting."

An illustration of just how much she loves creating art rather than the painting itself is the feeling Wezniak gets after a show during which all her paintings have been sold. "It's like all my children have left home." Wezniak says the feeling doesn't leave her until she starts working again and creates new pieces.

What results from the process, said Wezniak, tells a lot about her as a person. She said her art is a way of looking at forms which stems out of a deep emotional well. Critics have said her paintings have a spiritual, sensual aura about them, said Wezniak.

While an artist's life demands much discipline and commitment, the financial rewards often do not equal what is given personally. "It is a life without a lot of external rewards but the other rewards more than compensate for it."

The "other" rewards and the process are what keeps her in the art world, where she wants to stay for the rest of her life, she says. When she becomes physically unable to create art, Wezniak said, "I hope I'm dead." Artists peak later in life, she said, and it's not all over at age 30 or 40. "I hope to fall over right in the middle of my work."

Demands commitment

Wezniak said she is glad she is an artist now rather than when she was younger.

"I was not prepared back then to make that kind of a commitment, not prepared for what was involved. Until you have truly lived the part of doing work that obsesses you, drives you for years, it is hard to comprehend the intensity and depth of this drive.

"Instead of you having the tiger by the tail, the tiger has you by the tail."