

Arts & Galleries ART COMMENTARY

With Marion Wolberg Weiss

HONORING THE ARTIST: ELLEN FRANK

Among other things, Eastern Long Island is known for its birds. But such creatures are famous in their own right, as subjects of mythology, poetry and popular culture. (Who can ever forget Hitchcock's movie, *The Birds*?)

In real life, birds come and go, as they do in their yearly migration to Capistrano. Yet to cover artist Ellen Frank, birds come but they don't go: not in her mind nor her imagination. Or in her paintings. Simply put, such featured friends have become a part of Ms. Frank's aesthetic and personal iconography.

Consider, for example, that Ms. Frank lives near the water and is, therefore, privy to the wild life existing there. She recalls as if it were yesterday that "My first body of work here in East Hampton was conceived at Louse Point." Another early work was titled, "Let the Birds Sing."

Birds have assumed other meanings for Ms. Frank through the years. This week's cover, for example, features shore birds that may or may not be real according to the specialized technique that Ms. Frank used in conceptualizing the image. Thus, birds show that the "object and their reflection are the same."

The cover, "Song of the Longshoremen,"

also indicates aspects of the artist's methods, namely a particular mix of the color blue which she recalls seeing for the first time at twilight in Florence, Italy. Asked about other sources for her brand of blue, Ms. Frank names a favorite book, *On Being Blue*, from which the title of her painting comes. Even the tiles in her home are blue. "I'm in love with cobalt," Ms. Frank says, summing it all up quickly.

Regarding Ms. Frank's penchant for birds as "agents of peace," a most important subject is evoked: a new exhibit, "Cities of Peace," and its connection to Ms. Frank's new not-for-profit foundation, the Ellen Frank Illumination Arts Foundation, Inc., which has far-reaching implications. "First, the show, which had its debut in New York, will travel to other countries, world-wide," says Ms. Frank, her enthusiasm invigorating. "The project's overall theme is to turn 'anguish into beauty'; it features paintings of seven cities including Hiroshima, New York, Jerusalem and Baghdad."

Such a task took an enormous amount of work, and that's where the Foundation that Ms. Frank spearheaded played a part. "We had people who researched the history of each place, its symbols, everything," she explains.

The Foundation has assumed other salient philosophical goals: using art as a tool for peace; reaching out to diverse religions; addressing non-military solutions to conflict. Its practical objectives involve establishing an Illumination Atelier where people can learn the art and craft of illumination and where they eventually can come to have their own pieces illuminated.

In the meantime, Ms. Frank proceeds with supervising interns from all over the world and creating new illuminated works of art, including "Hanukkah Illuminated: A Book of Days."

Asked where this Foundation might eventually have its center, Ms. Frank answers succinctly and with relevance: "Wherever birds land, that's where the Foundation will be."

-Marion Wolberg Weiss

For more information about this project, contact Ms. Frank at www.efiaf.org or write her at 73 Squaw Road, East Hampton, New York, 11937.

Dan's Papers covers curated by Dan Rattiner and designed by Linda Braverman and Dan Rattiner.

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