



# Lyn Belisle: the path of discovery

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It's a busy First Friday in Southtown, with people milling around, visiting galleries and restaurants. On this particular night I have come to see the new paintings by Lyn Belisle shown at La Vida Gallery, a colorful little place on the northern edge of the artsy district. Collectively titled *30 Shades of Twilight*, her 30 small paintings are arrayed on the back wall, each a nearly abstract rendition of the late afternoon sky, bursting with luscious colors that hide a hint of turmoil.

The specific inspiration for the *Twilight* series came from the artist's observation of the sky as she was driving home one evening on Loop 410. "Every time I looked, there was a different view of sky and bridge or sky and power lines and all these colors," she explains a few days later when we meet in her small studio to talk. "Twilight is a good metaphor for the richness

of the day and has all the colors of the day — blue sky, grey sky, pink clouds, the gold of the sun and the orange of the sunset."

But for Belisle it also became a metaphor for change and endings, not only in terms of a single day but in a broader sense. She was feeling a little blue about her first grandson leaving for college and the realization that time is indeed running out. "At my age, you realize you have at best a couple of decades left. All these things were going through my mind," she says.

Abstract painting is a new beginning for Belisle, who has been an artist and art teacher all her life. She is better known for her paper collages, earthenware sculptures and mixed media collages, which often include a clay face. The first step in making those iconic faces that have come to be identified with her style

**Artist Lynn Belisle poses with some of the collages for which she is famous. She is opening a new studio and hopes to conduct Technology for Artists workshops.**

is a visit to a local cemetery, where she uses moist clay to delicately obtain a press mold of faces found on gravestones (without damaging the carvings). These are later embellished and kiln-fired in small editions of 10 to 15. Treated with essential oils, the faces become "scent shards," which proved to be very popular with buyers at her open-studio events and in galleries. "They are creepy-pretty. They exude a certain gothic appeal," says the artist. "They are all different and seem to resonate with people on different levels."

For her 3-D collages, the artist integrates the faces with photographic, text and other elements in framed configurations that tell mysterious stories in visual terms. A recent series was exhibited under the title *Encantos*, a most appropriate name. Belisle believes that artists "dip into the well of the collective subconscious" and she lets us, the viewers, decide what the stories are about.

In the past several years, her work has been shown in several local and regional venues. In addition to La Vida, she has had exhibits at the Nueva Street Gallery in La Villita, the Rockport Center for the Arts and twice at the San Antonio Art League Museum, where she won an award in the group's 2012 juried show. In addition, she conducts multiple workshops both at her studio and other locales, teaching a variety of creative endeavors.

"I've been so lucky; it's come all together for me recently," says the artist.

### ART, TEACHING AND TECHNOLOGY

A 35-year veteran of teaching art in public schools, mostly in NEISD, Belisle participated in a number of art shows throughout the 1980s and early '90s but gave up active art making about a decade ago when she was hired to teach computer applications and graphic design at Trinity University. The high-tech job took all her energy, as she was learning the very material she had to teach to the students. Eventually, a visit with her former studio partner, Carol Mylar, who now lives in Colorado Springs, motivated her to clean up her home studio and start creating. "I realized that come hell or high water, I needed to come back to art because I was really missing it," she says. Her first two-dimensional collages were small pieces used as artsy covers for journals or e-readers that gradually led to more complex and larger works and ultimately to the 3-D collages of recent years.

This past summer, Belisle had a similar motivating experience during a workshop taught by Gwen Fox in Taos, N.M., that introduced her to new acrylic colors and techniques. That same feeling of I-need-to-do-it-now pushed her to produce the *Twilight* series. Priced reasonably at \$90 each, nine canvases sold opening night. "A terrific feeling," admits the artist.

Her only child, the now-famous author of the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series, Rick Riordan, and his wife were mingling with the gallery-goers that night. After introducing me to them, Belisle explained that they would be moving to Boston, where their older son will be attending college, which was the reason for her blue feelings mentioned above. But now she has a more optimistic view of the situation: "I was so sad at first, but with



At left, one of Belisle's collages based on a clay mold of a face found on a gravestone. She visits local cemeteries and uses moist clay to obtain the press molds of the faces without damaging the carvings. Below, a selection of her paintings.



email and Facebook, Boston is no longer that far away," she explains. "I am going through a period of growth and discovery right now, and so are they. It's a good time for all of us to embark on a new journey. But I am looking forward to visiting them."

Since 1976, Belisle has been married to psychologist Michael Belisle with whom she shares a colorful home full of art and art objects. It's hard to take it all in at first, but one notices a row of multicolored books lined up on the mantel under a bright quilt by fiber artist Susan Monday. Upon closer inspection, the volumes turn out to be Riordan's books in various foreign translations, from German and Russian to Japanese. "I am a big fan of his," says the proud mama.

In the next few months, she has a lot to look forward to: another exhibit of her

paintings at the SoL Center in late April, and a move to a larger studio in the Carousel Court shopping center, next to her friend Ann Pearce's jewelry shop. The latter sometimes uses Belisle's small shards as decorative elements in her jewelry. There, she envisions expanding her workshops and helping other artists, especially the technology-challenged ones.

"I have friends who are good artists but are not savvy with computers that can help them to present and market their work," she notes. "If an artist is able to display her work digitally and find the right sites for that, she goes from a local gallery to world-wide exposure. I would like to use my new space to set up Technology for Artists workshops. I love teaching, especially adults who are really there to learn."