

Sitting Down With: Rassouli

Contributed by Kerri Blackstone

Fusionartist, Mystic Painter and Teacher

Gazing at any of Fusionartist Rassouli's creative works provides a glimpse into the mystic loving eye with which he looks at the world. Rassouli has been a celebrated and innovative painter since childhood who later trained as an architect. Born in Isfahan, Iran, and currently living in Southern California, Rassouli has developed an artistic style known as Fusionart. He feels this art form is an expression of cosmic unity, a coming together of mysticism and artistic expression.

The development of Fusionart has been his entire life's work, initiated in his childhood influenced by the historic and gorgeous home he grew up in, a mystic uncle and hours watching the whirling dervishes spin. Fusionart and his paintings blur the line between dream and reality — intentionally, since Rassouli sees the two as coexisting.

Rassouli is a prolific artist who has exhibited in solo and group shows worldwide. His work has appeared in and on the covers of a long list of publications and the Agape International Spiritual Center has showcased his paintings. *Inspirations of the Heart* is his most recent book; it contains a fusion of Rassouli's evocative art with Reverend Michael Bernard Beckwith's meditative musings. Rassouli also creates murals in public space and one of his more recent, titled *Angel of Unity*, can be seen by people walking at the ocean end of Washington Avenue in Venice. The Angel, like many of the women Rassouli paints, is radiant, flowing, like the breath of the cosmos herself.

Understanding his view on life, love and painting may come best from his own words. He started his interview with LA YOGA magazine by talking about his painting *Eternal Sun*.

Rassouli: Scientists were male so they call it the Big Bang. But what does Big Bang mean? Somebody hit something and a Big Bang happened? The truth is that it was a Big Birth. It was the divine feminine power that gave birth to the universe. We have the masculine power and we have the feminine power and they're in complete balance. It's just like darkness and light. They're completely opposite of each other and they coexist. Life is the union of opposites.

Kerri Blackstone: Do problems and chaos come to be because the powers are out of balance?

Rassouli: Chaos and problems are judgments. The truth is the chaos, problems, potential — all of this is one. The union of opposites. Is a sunset beautiful? Is a sunset ugly? A sunset is a sunset. It's the way we see it that makes it beautiful or ugly. If you were to be executed at sunset, the sunset would be ugly to you. Why does the sun shine? It doesn't have any reason. We must accept that the darkness and the light co-exist. One cannot destroy each other.

KB: Sometimes it feels like we have an obligation to fight against the darkness. What do you say to people who feel that accepting something, maybe a bad thing, is the same as giving in to it?

R: There are two ways of fighting. One is to retaliate; the other is to prevent the attack. To prevent is absolutely necessary which means we have to become enough to face that opposition. If I'm mad at somebody because they destroyed something that I had, then I'm going to be attacking them out of retaliation. That is what is not right.

KB: By attacking out of retaliation, we're just causing more hate and anger instead of trying to solve the problem?

R: Right. Instead I develop myself so that I'm able to face it. I'm working on a book that is about how we can become empowered through the opposition. I talk about the power of limits. We think limits limit us but it's the limits that make an artist begin to express herself.

KB: When we're given limits ‐ creatively, financially or personally ‐ they force us to become even more creative in order to get around them and reach our goals. Maybe those limits that seem like a bad thing, actually are helping us go further than we might have gone without them?

R: Exactly. It is the union of the two ‐ the body and the soul. The spirit and the body have become one and that's how we create. Imagine if existence were just gases ‐ hydrogen, oxygen ‐ it wouldn't have any meaning. The union of these things together ‐ the outside and the inside ‐ gives it meaning, like a balloon. The air and the skin of the balloon together make the balloon. The air without the skin would expand to infinity. The skin without the air would be a piece of rubber that we usually bury six feet under. That air is the soul, infinite, no limits. The skin is the body that the soul goes into and gives it form.

KB: Do you believe the soul is eternal? Is it something that has always been there and then it comes into our bodies for a time to allow us to create in this form and then returns to being infinite?

R: Soul is the flow. Soul is energy. It has no identity, no personality. Imagine the soul is a river that's flowing. Whatever's inside that river isn't aware of anything; it's just in the flow. But then it comes into a little brook and it ends up somewhere, like a dead end. That part of the river that is inside the brook is us. That part of the river is not happy and it wants to join the flow. If it has big high rocks or mountains around it, it gets trapped and can't get back to the river. If it doesn't have any of these, then it finds its way back.

KB: What are the rocks and edges in our lives? Fears, doubts and limits we put on ourselves?

R: No, those rocks and edges are our culture, heritage, upbringing, education, what our mothers taught us from childhood, what teachers tell us, what society tells us, what our religion tells us, what everything tells us. The more we've learned, the more difficult it is for our spirit to get back to the flow.

KB: That makes it sound like learning is a bad thing that keeps us separated from our true nature.

R: Learning is not a bad thing or a good thing. Education is one thing, training is something else. Learning (or education) is to unify us. You and I read the same book, 30,000 people read the same book, three million people see the same movie or listen to the same lecture. That's one side. On the other side, training is to individualize us.

KB: By training, do you mean doing what we need to do to prepare for our profession?

R: I mean doing what you love to do. Doing what you love to do has nothing to do with your education. You might love to cook or you might love to meditate. Developing yourself to do what you love, developing your deepest self ‐ that's the training. Education and training have to work together for us, for the individual.

KB: A lot of people today feel stuck inside a consumer lifestyle where we're convinced we need to spend our lives working for the things that will supposedly make us happy. They follow that path but at the end of the day, there's no meaning to it. How do we get away from that?

R: We have to accept it. Accepting it means bringing it into our life. We adjust ourselves to the night. We're not saying night is bad or night is good. We accept it and we deal with it. I could yell and scream at night forever, "Why are you here? I'm going to destroy you! I'm going to blow you up!" I could do that but the truth is we have to live with night. This is not a matter of destroying day or night. It's a matter of living with both. Yoga is finding a balance between my physical being and my spiritual being.

KB: Do you feel like you were born an artist or is it something that developed as you were going through your training and education?

R: First, let's define artist. I don't consider myself a painter. I am an artist. Art is a verb. Art is bringing the two together. Art is about union. So when you say 'art-ing', that's bringing the two hearts together.

Imagine a necklace of pearls. Each pearl has two holes for the string to go through. This pearl is called heart. If my pearl does not have a hole, the string is not going to go through it. The string that goes through these pearls is what we call love. Some call it God. Michael Beckwith calls it Agape, which is a Latin word for unconditional love.

Now if there is only one hole, the string is going to go in there and stop. There's got to be another hole for that string to come out in order for the necklace to be formed — the union of the pearls — which is what I'm calling 'heart-storming'. The medium that does that is God or love or Yoga — which are all the same.

KB: Are we all born with two holes in our pearl? If so, what causes one of both of these holes to get blocked along the way?

R: We're all born with the two holes but very quickly we begin to lose the child within us. We begin to not use the holes so they get rusty and pretty soon, they close.

It's the same as the blood that goes through the heart. The mystics call it the wine. That wine or blood goes into your heart, gets purified and comes back out. The same thing happens with love. We've got to put love into everything we do in order to experience that pure oneness, to develop that unity, to be part of that Yoga. Just like this magazine which is called Los Angeles Yoga: the union of the angels.

KB: Why do you think some people are able to realize that God is inside of them, when most spend their time searching for God in the external world or some other dimension?

R: Because I am a mystic, I know that God is inside of me. Whenever I need to ask something, I ask my heart, 'What do I do next?' and my heart tells me what to do. Nobody's heart is ever wrong. Even when it seems to be going the wrong way, it is going the right way.

KB: How are we able to tell the difference between what our heart and what our rational mind is telling us based on what we've learned and been conditioned to believe?

R: The soul is on Earth to enjoy it. The tree is doing its treeing because it enjoys treeing. The roots are rooting, the branches are branching, the fruit is fruiting. They're not thinking about anything but loving what they're doing.

The tree is making love all the time — whether its winter or fall, it is still making love. 'God-ing' is what we call love. To 'God' means loving because that's what God does — loves. We are created to enjoy every moment, to be the creator, to love. God has made us to be God. The whole idea for us is to love.

We have this rational mind for the protection of the body, that's it. Without the rational mind, I might walk into the street and a car hits me, or I walk into a wall or I go outside in the winter and catch cold. My soul doesn't need protection — my soul is connected with my heart. If my mind wants to decide for my heart, it's going to be wrong. And if my heart wants to decide for my mind, it's going to be wrong as well. The two have to work together.

On Sundays early in the morning, I climb the mountain in the dark, sit on the peak of the mountain and wait for the sun to

come. I love walking in the dark because mystery is the essence of creativity. Without mystery there would not be artists or scientists & it's the mystery that attracts us. I watch the transition from darkness to light, from cool to warm, from blues into yellows. I watch and I meditate. I am asking the Sun, my creator to wash away all the darkness inside me, whatever has captured me this last week. I go through my complete Yoga, knowing I'm being cleansed in the process. I have become one with everybody and everything & mountains, sea, sky. In that waiting for the beloved to appear, I experience true union. That is the unity that prayer brings to us; that Yoga brings to us. Then I come to my studio and begin to paint.

KB: Do you feel you're still in a trance and/or meditative state when you come down from the mountain and start painting? How do you keep yourself into that state?

R: Oh yes. But it depends. Whenever I feel good, I paint and whenever I paint, I feel good. I don't paint to make a painting. When I paint I'm dancing. And as I'm playing with paint, I begin to fly. I'm conscious, but I'm not aware of what I'm doing.

That's the problem with people who use external means of getting high. When you're using internal means of being high, it's empowering, and the next morning you can build up on it. If I drink and get drunk, in those moments it feels good but next morning it's a problem because I'm down again. If I get high from my inner being, the next morning I build up on it and get even higher. Every painting I do is in a different zone and at a different level than the one before. Everything keeps building up so I'm transforming constantly. This is how you can judge a work of an artist. Does the work come from a divine power or someone who is under an external influence?

KB: It's fairly common for people, especially in the arts and music, to try to reach that trance state through the external influence of drugs and alcohol. How can they begin to find inspiration from an internal high instead?

R: Again, it's the relationship of creation and destruction. The creative one puts things out there and the editor is the destroyer who takes things away. If the editor leads the way, you're in trouble because it shuts off the process before it even starts. This happens with many artists, they start editing themselves before they begin to create. It took Brahms twenty-five years to compose his first symphony because he was comparing himself to Beethoven.

KB: How do we keep our editor on the sidelines until it's his time to help?

R: Leila, creation and destruction, is going to take place at the same time. If you watch me paint, I'm creating at the canvas, and then I stand back and the editor can see, then I'm back at the canvas and painting. I'm in the trance state this whole time and the editor is well trained to do his job. It's like when you're driving. Your driver is your editor. You're in your own world, putting lipstick on, talking on the phone, thinking about your day, but the driver is your editor. The editor knows how to handle things without hurting the creative being. Let's say I take the pink brush and put some pink paint here, at the same time, I'm destroying the blue paint that was underneath. I am destroying and creating at the same time.

KB: When you're in the trance, creating and editing a painting, do you have an idea or vision in your mind of what the end product will be?

R: Not at all. Actually, when I'm painting, a lot of times, I will turn the canvas upside down and work from that perspective and the painting becomes something totally different. I do this with students at my workshops and they see that what they were painting was an entire landscape that they didn't even see.

KB: When you teach, how do you help people get themselves into the trance state so that their creative energy can start to flow?

R: It's always different. Sometimes, I have them close their eyes, get close to the canvas and paint without looking at the canvass. I tell them, "If you open your eyes, your painting is finished." Once it's done, they can open your eyes and find out that it is completely different that it was in their mind. Now the editor starts comparing what you've done to what you had in mind and now the creator can stand with the editor and really see

what is there.

I often see things that I didn't know I had painted, they just come through. I'll see for example the shape of an old man leaning over with a book in front of him and he seems to be writing on something. Now when my editor sees that, he can eliminate the parts that don't belong to that, the parts around it, so that what came through me can really pop out. This is the process of creating.

KB: I read a quote you gave that said 'I'm not painting something abstract, but something more real than what we see.' Do you mean that what we see is an illusion and, if so, is there any value in it?

R: Reality is only one manifestation of the truth. For example: a bird and flight. The bird is only a manifestation of flight. Flight never dies but the bird dies. Truth is immortal but reality is mortal. What I paint is the truth. Not the changing reality. What you see in my paintings is not abstraction. Abstraction is not dealing with the reality or the truth or anything. It is innocent painting — I'll just paint and people will see whatever they want to see in it. It's their thing and whatever they want to do with it is their business. That's why painters who paint abstraction don't usually title their paintings. My paintings are about the truth beyond the reality.

Many students and artists follow my school of teaching and we have retreats and workshops. It's all about play and I get them in the zone to play. At the end everybody discusses their process so the others can benefit from it. It's a safe zone for people to play and it's a place of healing for everyone. No one is judging.

KB: Would you consider your workshops and retreats to be a form of art therapy?

R: With art therapy you are trying to open up the mind and here I am trying to open up the heart. I am a vehicle that allows people to take the journey of transformation. I explain that they're doing the act of creativity which is 'God-ing'. What do they have in the dictionary instead of 'God-ing'? Love. You want to be giving love. That is the creative process. I gave them pastels and paper and told them to do the act of love-making with the paper and the chalk. I told them not to create anything like anything else. Create like God. Play like God. That's how you can expand your love. And they got it.

KB: If you could share one piece of advice with people who want to follow their heart, what would it be?

R: Know that you are greater than even you think you are. You were the winner amongst infinite numbers of creatures in that drop of sperm. You were the messiah among millions.

So act upon it. Whatever you do, be the best at it. Rumi says, 'Footprints lead you to the shore of the sea, from there on no trace remains.' Learn from others, so you can find a way to get to the shore of the sea. There you are on your own. Dive in. And experience that infinite sea.

For more information about Rassouli or to attend a workshop, visit: Rassouli.com. Look for future collaborations with Rassouli and LA YOGA where people can come together to create love.