



S. BROOKE ANDERSON

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S. Brooke Anderson is a Vancouver painter whose oeuvre ranges from landscape to portraiture. Her work is versatile, reflecting nuanced sensitivity, texture and line, interweaving alchemical synergies with unseen worlds. Her work invokes awe and wonder in a world tired of disenchantment. Brooke's work hangs in the Official Residence of the Governor General of Canada, in Ottawa, Ontario

Painting is a part of your spiritual life, you have described it as: "Art is a doorway to the mystery... and as such, my landscapes and portraiture seek to embrace both the seen and the unseen." Please shine some light on this.

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depth than we can perceive. I seek to integrate these two realms through my work. The unseen realm is a world of unity, where light and shadow merge and imagination reigns. It is infused with spirit and holds the essence of the world we walk through. Art is a portal to bring this essence forward for the viewer, to glimpse.

Your landscapes have been described as simply mind-blowing and out of this world. Tell us about more about you create these impactful works.

To express the essence of a landscape, I turn away from the noise and distractions of this world and enter into the realm that infuses the land with spirit. I see through the eyes of my heart and connect to something larger than myself, which offers me a wider view. My best work comes when I surrender and allow my imagination to flow



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freely. An intuitive process leads me into an altered state, where all that exists is simply the moment. It is through this surrender that I can experience a kind of communion with the sacred. Art becomes a form of prayer for me leading me to a place of renewal. When I paint quickly, the brush strokes charge the painting with energy and a sense of movement.

I paint in oils now, almost exclusively. Colour is a powerful and emotionally evocative force—and I love pulling the light out of darkness; it symbolizes the world of duality through which we walk.

Your portraits show a similar subtlety that we find your landscapes. How do you approach working on portraits?

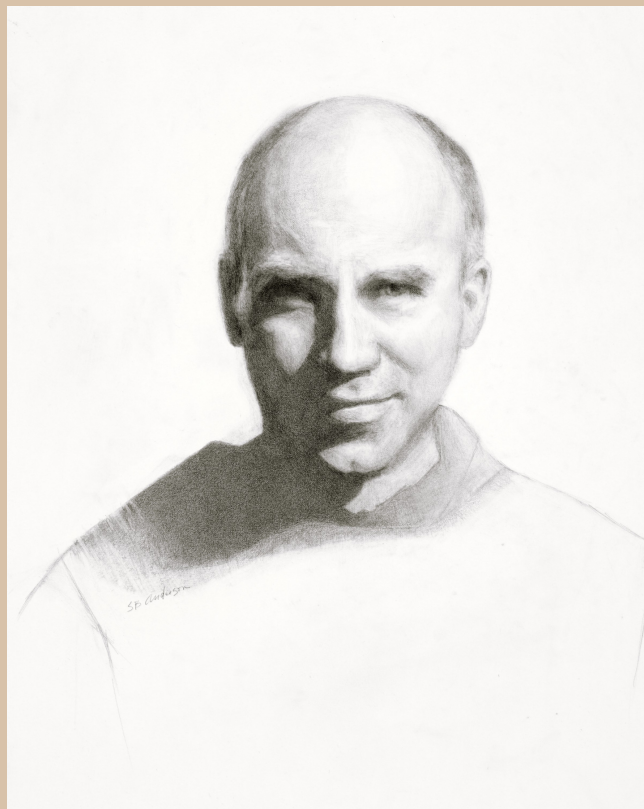
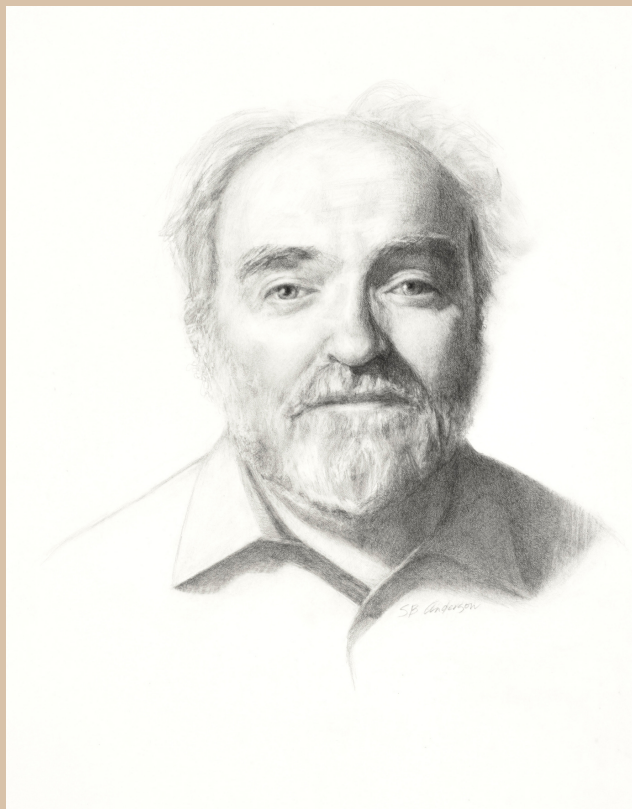
Portraiture is a more contained and methodical approach. Once the subject's features are mapped in, the foundation of the portrait is established. A sense of likeness and form emerge as dark and

light coalesce. I have always been drawn to portraiture, as a way to explore our connection to one another as human beings in the world, despite our differences. We all embody an exquisite, divine spark that resides deep within. It radiates the light and beauty of who we really are. Every created thing carries the signature of its creator.

Through portraiture, I seek to connect with this deeper essence and bring it forward, in all its subtle awareness.

You exhibited at the Nagasaki Peace Museum and the Japanese Overseas Migration Museum in Yokohama. Share with us a bit about these experiences and how they came about.

For many years, I worked for an airline and when Japan became a new route, I studied Japanese. The language resonated with me and with intensive study, I qualified as a language speaker.

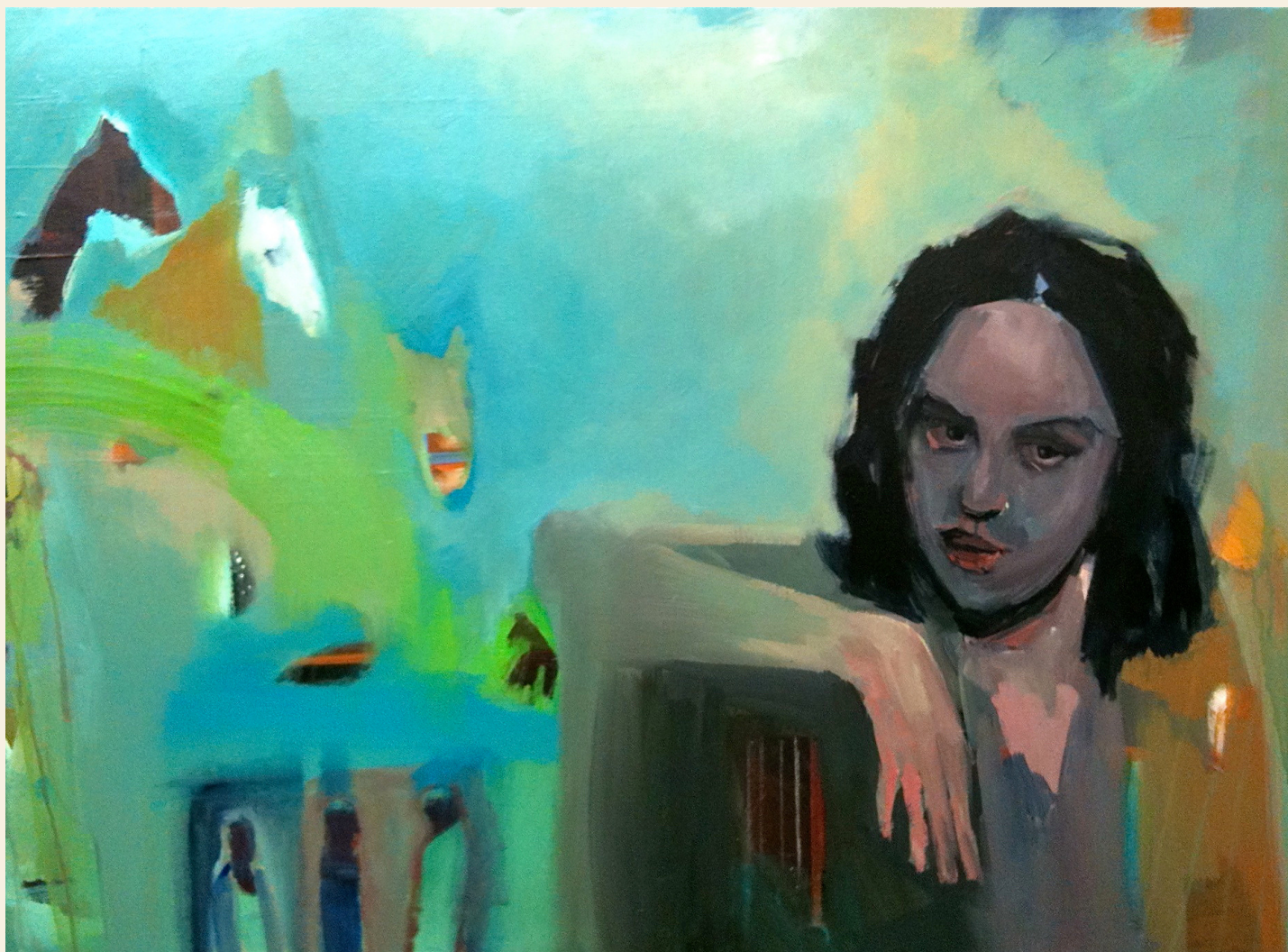




This opened up the opportunity for me to visit Japan three times a month and control my schedule, as my daughters were very young at the time. I found a master shodo painter living in Kyoto and became his student. I travelled regularly by train, to learn from him. Time spent, was rich in experience and I still feel his influence surface in my work today. During this time, a historian friend, began sharing passport photos from the archives, of Japanese citizens who had immigrated to Canada in the late 1800's.

I found beauty in the vulnerability and courage they expressed, and was inspired to paint them. Personal

quotes accompanied these photos describing their hopes and dreams for a new life. The big skies and open spaces of Canada's landscape fueled their imagination. These Portraits and my landscapes merged to create 'Kusawake' (pioneer). The Canadian Consulate in Tokyo arranged for this exhibition to be shown in Yokohama and Kyoto. I received an invitation to exhibit in Nagasaki the following year. Although I no longer worked for Air Canada, they generously sponsored all transportation to and from Japan. Some of these paintings now reside in the Yokohama Migration Museum in Japan and the Japanese Nikkei Museum in Vancouver, as part of their permanent collections.



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You ran a volunteer art program in the prison system. Tell us about this experience and what creativity meant to the prisoners.

This program evolved in collaboration with American artist Jerome Gastaldi who created a workbook (*Keep an Eye on Your Soul*), encouraging artists to find inspiration and passion through their work. We are all artists, wired to create, so I used this book and designed an approach specific to the prison population. The atmosphere of the prison was grim—the interior was stark and all walls were bare. Deprivation of colour and beauty seemed a part of incarceration—this was confirmed during my first workshop. Images for collage I brought in and displayed for the women, were hungrily gathered to themselves, as if starving for food at a banquet table. It was revealing. Through art, inmates explored the power of their thoughts, how imagination creates reality, and how art can transform conflict and more.

Time spent in free flow creativity was opportunity for them to leave the drama and chaos of confinement and enter the stillness within; a place of freedom and healing. The more they returned to this inner space, the more nourishing it became. Art helped them to remember who they really are, despite transgressions or mistakes made. There was beauty in their vulnerability and courage—I didn't expect to love them so much. My intention to

spend a year with them, turned into a decade. This program expanded into the men's prison, where I found men equally, if not more, in need of entering the still, sacred space that creativity offers. As I walked beside those living in the darkest shadows of our society, I experienced their true essence—who they were under the surface. My heart expanded in ways I did not expect.

How did this experience affect your art?

During our time together, inmates shared personal stories, and most heart-breaking, were stories that involved the separation of a Mother and child. Loss of connection brought deep sorrow. With incarceration, birthdays, milestones and entire childhoods are missed. I recalled how difficult it had been for me as a working mother, to leave my children and fly half way around the world. By comparison, the experience of these mothers was brutal and humbling, bringing new meaning to my understanding of the anguish of separation. Their heartache was palpable. In order for me to process their pain, I would enter my studio to paint and over time, portraits of the women and their struggles evolved. With the respect for privacy and need for anonymity, the faces I painted were not specific to one individual, but an embodiment of many, whose poignant stories overlapped.

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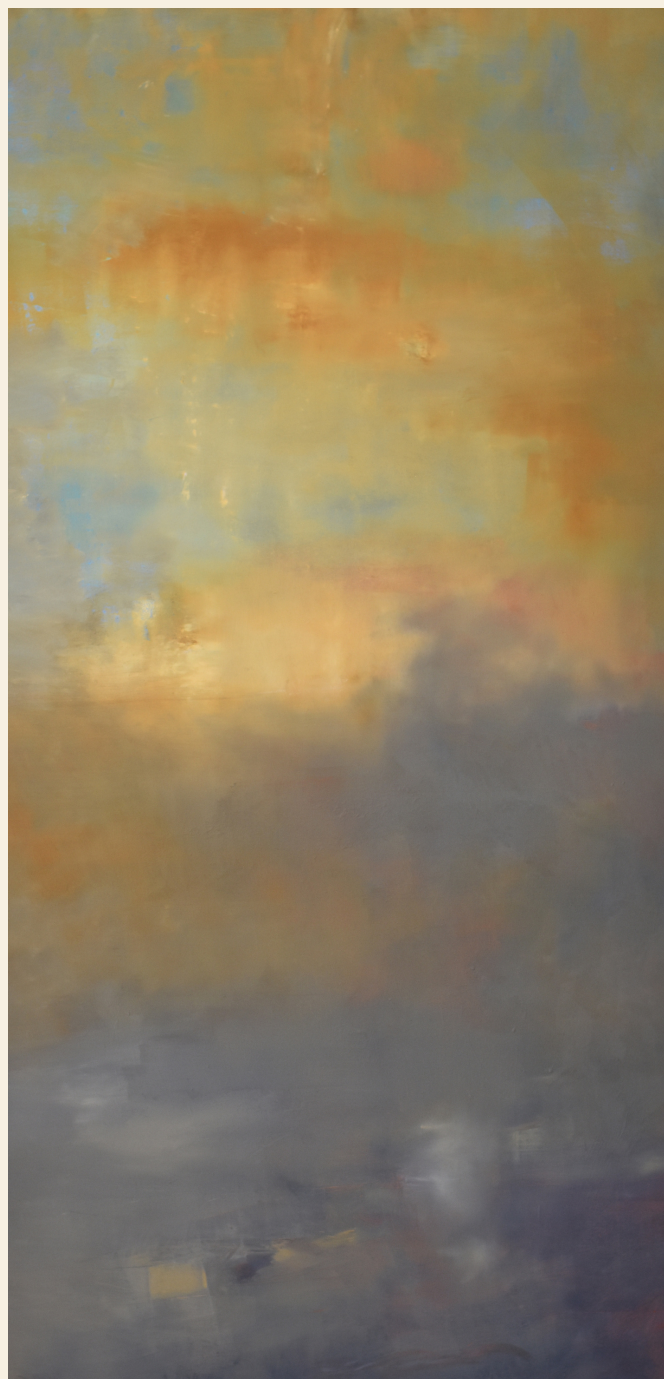


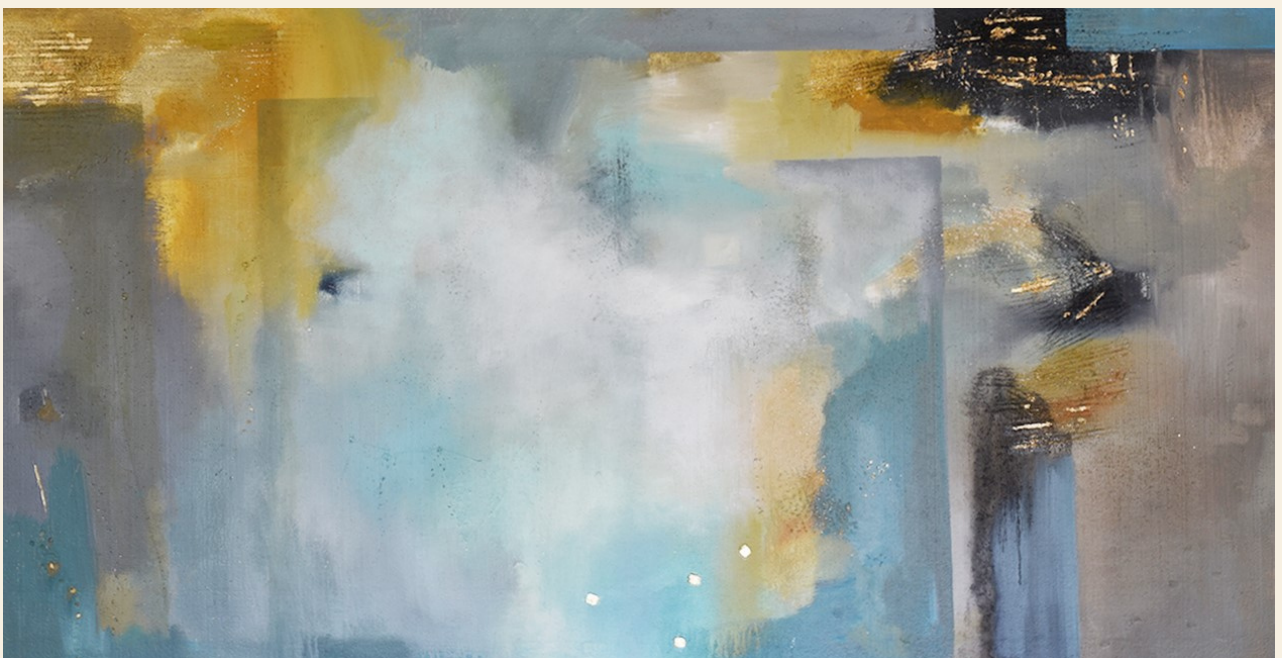
Tell us about your work on the book 'Spiritual Voices'?

Spiritual Voices is an interfaith book and was initiated by New Seeds: The Thomas Merton Centre in Toronto. The project highlights twelve Canadians who share a glimpse of their walk in the world, through personal reflections on life, stories of faith or scholarly essays. I was invited to join the project to render portraits of each contributor. Spiritual Voices included contributions from scholars, rabbis, an imam, a writer, a singer and mystic, a priest, a nun, and more. I traveled to France, Texas, New York and Toronto to take photographs for reference. My role in the project expanded as time went on, to include greater responsibilities and sharing my journey into prison. The highlight of this project was the connection and friendships formed with those I met.

Why did you want to be an artist, what drew you to art in the first place?

My Mother was an artist and I was surrounded by art at an early age. We often painted together and the combination of her gentle nature with her bohemian free spirit inspired me. We are all wired to create and this is most clear in childhood. A child can pick up a crayon and draw a horse with inspired, wild, abandon, until someone comes along and says 'that doesn't look like a horse'. Everything changes in that moment for the child, who then believes he or she cannot draw. I never experienced this discouragement, so always believed I could. What we believe matters and shapes our lives. I was an introvert and I turned to the creative process for the sheer pleasure of art making, but also in times of my deepest emotional needs. I soon learned







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that creativity opened a path to greater awareness. Art was my call into the mystery and the world of the unknown, that eventually led me to seek even deeper.



You are highly skilled across different mediums. Share some insight into how you developed your skill.

There is a theory that asserts the key to achieving true expertise in any skill, is simply a matter of practicing for 10,000 hours. I think having a passion for any pursuit must be part of the equation, otherwise it may feel like an onerous burden. We all have unique gifts to share and recognizing these gifts, allows us to gain understanding of our purpose. The first clue is what do we really enjoy? In my journey as an artist, I sought what inspired me—I took workshops in Sweden, Florence and Southern Italy, painted beside masters who generously mentored me, experimented with various techniques, but mostly I simply painted and pursued what I loved. It takes time and perseverance to reach 10,000 hours, but 10,000 hours is only 416 days— just over a year! So if you have a dream that really calls to you, 10,000 hours, once passed, seems but a moment.

Tell us about life in Vancouver, what does the city and Canada mean to you and your work?

Vancouver is an inspiring place to paint. I am currently working on a project in collaboration with singer and mystic Ann Mortifee, (one of Canada's best voices). I am hoping to travel to Israel next year to further my study of the Essenes. I will take my paints with me and paint the Holy land.

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Gallery: www.idavictoriagallery.com