

For protection of creatures great and small: Loggerhead Turtle Paintings

By YARA ZAKHARIA, ESQ.

With the BP oil spill sounding a loud, resounding wake-up call, American nature painter and artist Judith Maddox Saylor is using art to awaken the collective social conscience and raise awareness about the loggerhead turtle population and our ecosystem- the inhabitants of the sea and land, as well as the price that nature has paid as result of man's recklessness. Drawing a parallel between the plight of the canaries in the coal mines and that of the loggerhead turtles in the Gulf of Mexico and beyond, she notes that "greed causing devastation in this world is not new...neither is preying upon the innocent." Saylor, who describes herself as a quiet activist, wants the public to join her in advocating for those who cannot speak in our language. "When you see the helpless creatures beaching themselves and covered in oil, the scene speaks for itself, and it's heartbreaking," she states.

The subjects of her paintings are the endangered species, such as the Loggerhead turtle and the American crocodile, as well as endangered plant life. Saylor, who has been drawing her whole life and has been painting on canvas since 2003, was born in Philadelphia and lives between Key Biscayne, Linwood, New Jersey, and New Mexico. Having been raised on a farm, she was always close to nature and taught to be environmentally-sensitive. "In the 1950's, we recycled, composted, and did all of the things that people are encouraged to do today, and if something was broken, we fixed it, rather than disposed of it," she points out.

Her love affair with the loggerhead turtle developed when she was painting at the Crandon Park cabanas, in the vicinity of which the creatures lay their eggs. Naturalists from the Biscayne Nature Center were showing a group of school children skulls of loggerheads, ranging from those of babies to the large ones, and Saylor became fascinated by them. The only time that the loggerheads come on land is to lay their eggs. Thus far, she has completed four paintings on the loggerhead turtle, with the first piece created in 2005. Her most recent loggerhead painting, titled "Endangered Loggerhead Turtle Skull No. 4- Gulf Oil Spill-It Just Takes One" was begun in 2005 and finished in early June of this year. "The 'Endangered Loggerhead Turtle Skull, No.2' offers some of the features of the loggerhead's world; it has a small flower called a railroad runner, which grows on the beach and features a patterning resembling that of railroad tracks and the Morning Glory," she describes. It is a female with tears (marks) on her skull and a heart-shaped orbit or eye, and there are turtle eggs on the beach. The painting communicates the impermanence of life and the importance of facilitating change for a better tomorrow.

"It's important how everyone does the small things in life because these are the building blocks for the larger things," Saylor wisely observes. All creatures that inhabit the earth, she indicates, are related in one way or another. The London Saatchi Gallery found her work online and asked if she would accept to be one of their artists on the web. The artist is encouraging the public to visit her website at www.JAMSArtworks.com and vote for the "Endangered Loggerhead Turtle Skull, No. 4" by clicking on the link below the painting. "This will put the turtle in the forefront and call attention to its need to survive." This painting, which was featured at the Biscayne Nature Center's gallery as well as a gallery in New York, is currently on display at the Art Fusion gallery in the Miami Design District.

"Whether it is driving our cars less, turning the air conditioning down, or turning off the lights more often, learning to do without is paramount because we often take everything for granted," she gently remarks. "If enough people do enough small things, it makes a big impact," adds Saylor. She has also granted non-profit groups such as the San Diego-based Pro-Peninsula, the right to utilize freely the image of her latest loggerhead painting in their fundraising drives and to help save the turtles through different programs- getting locals to participate and improving the creatures' habitat and environment. "We need to protect our natural world, and I think a lot of people are working hard to ensure that we will have a comfortable life; we just have to take it to another level and need a meeting of the minds," emphasizes the devoted artist and visionary.

Giclee (squirt ink) prints of Saylor's first and second loggerhead turtle paintings are available online at www.JAMSArtworks.com and www.judithsaylor.com. For further information, Saylor may be contacted at JAMSArtworks@aol.com.