



ANN HARPER Queen of The Dolls Oil on canvas 36" x 24" 2008



STEVE SHANKS My Time is Coming Oil on canvas 48" x 36" 2009

The Happy Couple: Ann Harper and Steve Shanks

Some people notice the similarities and others focus on the differences of our work. To us, it all makes perfect sense in a world filled with non-sense and chaos. We are a team and a partnership. We play off of each other, help give life to each other's visions and lift each other's voices in ways that no one else can. We balance each other. Our lives and our destinies are intricately woven together so it is reasonable to believe our art is as deeply connected.

We are Ann Harper and Steve Shanks. We're married and the things that drew us together have multiplied over the years and the connectedness sometimes shows up in paintings. We each paint about hope in a world that is often void of hope and where an ugly reality pushes down the hope we all

want. To find the hope we must first acknowledge the ugliness where both exists side-by-side.

We paint uniquely and independently but we do it with our easels lined up next to each other, five feet apart. We share ideas and we talk about how to express them. We challenge each other and move each other forward. Techniques have been learned and practiced together so styles may sometimes be similar but we each have a voice that we work very hard to protect. We each have things that we want to say and we help each other to say them.

Ann's work often comes from what she sees and hears as a psychotherapist, still very involved in her practice. Themes generally focus on healing and winning the battles that we all struggle with



ANN HARPER Circus Pet Oil on canvas 36" x 24" 2008



ANN HARPER Harvest Oil on canvas 36" x 24" 2009

and are always figurative. Though sometimes darker than Steve's work, the underlying theme often represented in symbols and metaphor is always about light winning out over the darkness. Subjects are often children/adults metaphorically finding their way to the other side. "Queen of the Dolls" harkens back to a childhood where we were able to create our own worlds out of what we had to work with. The Doll Queen lives in a world that she controls and where she reigns supreme. "Harvest" uses birds as symbols of what we need to harvest in our lives, freedom, wisdom, joy and love. Plant the symbolic seeds and they will be there for the taking. "Circus Pet" is a bit darker and represents the harnessed soul inside each of us and the need to set ourselves free. We are often in bondage to the idealized self we want to present to the world.

Steve's work is also about relationships and contrast. He seeks to communicate how things affect each other; how childhood experiences continue to affect our view of the world today. Often the subjects of his work are waiting. We spend our lives waiting... and thinking. The subjects in his paintings all have eyes that are large, innocent and pure. They take in everything around them without filters. In the painting "My Time is Coming", the figure is waiting for her time. Her destiny is coming and she wants to control it but that is a very difficult thing to do. She wants to direct her destiny and she is holding it in her arms, trying to own it. In "Cat Got Your Face", the cats are a blend of animal and human characteristics representing who we are in reality. These human/cats group together, watchful, waiting and protective of each other. In "Sermon to the Birds", the birds are being taught the ways of the innocent. But the birds are wild and untamed and words are of no interest to them. They live in the moment and see things as they really are unlike the innocent who still sees the world as the way it should be.

Differences and similarities are equally valuable when working together. Lightness and darkness, hope and despair, good and evil all balance each other in a world meant to be balanced in this way. In the end, we work together because we love it and because it balances us as a partnership. We respect each other's strengths and make up for each other's weaknesses. We are a happy couple of artists!

STEVE SHANKS Cat Got Your Face Oil on canvas 36" x 48" 2008





STEVE SHANKS Seeds of Greatness Oil on canvas 40" x 30" 2009

www.HarperShanks.com

Ann Harper and Steve Shanks are husband and wife artists living in Michigan. Ann is a Family Therapist. She received her master's degree from University of Michigan. Steve is a full time artist. Their work can be seen in my private and public venues, as well as on their website.