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# Interview with Artist Gwen Cates and her new series, "Cosmic Monologues."

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By [Scott Autton](#)



photo by Chris Profera

International artist, Gwen Cates, spends her time between Virginia and California. She began painting in the 1960s and has had art exhibits in Britain and the United States. She describes herself as a contemporary colorist, creating experimental and playful abstract paintings in acrylic, often with collage elements. The images have been inspired and grew out of earlier *plein air* landscapes and figurative work.

Gwen calls the current series of paintings "Cosmic Monologues." Going deeper into her subconscious and the world of dreams, Gwen reveals fantasies from her imagination. She creates archetypal images and incorporates winged figures, horses and other animals in her compositions. Swatches of fabric, lace, gold leaf and lichen from oak trees are some of the elements that are included in the paintings.

Gwen Cates invites you to her new solo exhibit on November 9th. Her artwork can be viewed on her website: [www.gwencates.com](http://www.gwencates.com)

**Presenting a solo exhibit is a great accomplishment, so hats off to you for your many successes. Can you describe the work that is put in to creating the solo exhibit?**

Each of my solo exhibits has a different theme, and each time my goal has been to express deep-seated archetypal images drawn from earlier landscapes, figurative paintings, research and dreams. I paint to transform these concepts through vibrant color and strong compositions to create powerful and imaginative paintings. I use acrylic paint and mediums to create layers and embed gold leaf, algae from oak trees, butterflies and other natural materials in my work. My next solo exhibit is "Cosmic Monologues" which will be held in Los Angeles, opening November 4th, 2019.

At this point in my career, I have shown my paintings in many solo exhibits around the country and in Britain. Each solo exhibit has offered a unique challenge, not only from a creative perspective but also a logistic one. The last time I exhibited in London, I had to roll up each painting and ship them in cardboard tubes, reassemble them and then my daughter drove her horse van into Earl's Court in the city center. Luckily the effort was worth it, because the metaphysical art show at Edith Grove Gallery was a great success, with all of the painting selling to a curious, rather royal and enthusiastic audience. There was nothing to take home but new friendships and a smile.

**Your exhibit, "Cosmic Monologues" will take viewers into a new realm. What is your own personal cosmic monologue?**

My awareness of the global climate crisis has contributed to the paintings I have created for my new exhibit, "Cosmic Monologues." Like human-beings, the cosmos goes through many deaths and re-births. The thought of the void can terrify us. Yet when our heart is empty from tragedy or loss, that is the time when we may get a glimpse of one of the unexpected luminosities of reality, such as we see in these paintings. Empty space is not ever truly vacant, nor can our lives ever truly be blank or meaningless. Virtual particles move in and out of existence constantly, just as we do. Going deeper into my subconscious and the world of dreams, I reveal fantasies from my imagination, creating archetypal images, such as winged figures, horses and other animals, as well as stars, planets and black holes. Swatches of fabric, lace, gold leaf and lichen from oak trees are some of the elements that are included in the paintings.

I have continued to be fascinated by phenomena such as Exoplanets, planets which have attributes that suggest that they could support life, and this is part of my personal cosmic monologue. The new Event Horizon Telescope has made even the impossible concept of black holes visible through photography. I was inspired to create my own abstract versions of some of these awesome cosmic events. The act of painting helps me to experience the world in ways I cannot otherwise imagine. When I started this series, little did I realize what an amazing adventure I was about to embark upon! In "Cosmic Monologues" I explore this mysterious dance in which we all play a role, either consciously or unconsciously. Come to the exhibit, and as you walk amongst the paintings, ask yourself whether you feel the void between stars, the

presence of consciousness, or perhaps something else?

**Reinventing oneself can often be seen as a harrowing journey to take on. How did you manage to tackle this with both gusto and grace?**

When I enter my studio, I begin by doing a meditation in which I ask to receive guidance. I suggest to myself that when I finish my meditation I will be in touch with my higher consciousness and I will know exactly what I need to create at that time and in that space.

Embracing the concept of the Black Hole as a brilliant cosmic adventure rather than darkness that destroys matter, has been the outcome of that adventure into the unknown.

Isaac Newton said, "If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants." My version of the quote is: "When I wish to create art, I imagine standing with one foot on Picasso right shoulder and the other on Georgia O'Keefe's left." Both artists fill me with gusto and grace. Every decade or so, life conspires in a way in which I am forced to reinvent myself in order to survive. After the death of my husband while looking at Black Holes, I realized that empty space is never truly vacant, nor can our lives ever truly be blank, or meaningless. At that point I began to paint a new series. "Cosmic Monologues" takes us on a journey between absence and consciousness.

**How have your life experiences influenced your work as an artist?**

Growing up on a farm and later owning rural property has kept me in touch with the earth and has given me strength to meet life's challenges. The opportunity to attend colleges and study fine art has given me the skills that I need to create paintings that express my passion for the landscapes where I live through *en plain air* paintings. My style changed dramatically when I moved from Virginia to Santa Ynez, California because I responded to the different terrain and colors. At one point I tore up my wedding veil and created a series of collage paintings with it.

When I was at the University of Virginia taking a graduate level class in astronomy I had a professor, a rather dry scientist, who allowed me to paint portraits of each of the planets in our solar system rather than take the exam for the class. I created oil paintings depicting unique characteristics about each planet, and that is why it was a portrait. I gave a presentation showing my paintings and afterward the professor said, "Gwen has not only shared with us a portrait of each of the planets, but she has also revealed a part of her soul."

After my husband passed away, I had difficulty getting back to work on my paintings. I was beginning to enjoy exploring archetypal images with acrylic collage, gold leaf and natural materials. Then I began to read news reports about exciting phenomena such as exoplanets and black holes. Astronomers have created the Event Horizon Telescope which is able to reach far into the Cosmos and show images of the colorful auras that surround and encircle black holes. I realized that that could be an adventure that would help to bring me out of the darkness that I had experienced since my husband of 57 years passed away. I am ready for a new experience and adventure as I explore these astonishing shapes. Recently, I felt the need

to move toward abstract work that allows me to express my inner passions that have evolved as I move into the wiser years of my life when there is so much more to draw upon both literally and figuratively.

**What has been the oddest time that an inspiration for your artwork has come to you?**

I was standing in the living room of a house that I lived in on a mountaintop. I noticed a light shape on the wall in front of me. There was a skylight above me, and I knew the light was coming from above. The light shape disappeared and I didn't think about it again until the next day when the shape re-appeared. I realized I had been given an iconic gift from my spirit guides that I could explore. I took out my charcoals and a pad of paper and began to draw the vortexes outlined in light. I realized then that the shape was a gift and that I was being guided to do a series of archetypal drawings. I had a romance with vortexes which evolved into light cages with winged figures. These painting evolved into a series of deva and angel paintings, and some of these had fragments my wedding veil in them. These paintings can be viewed on my website: [www.gwencates.com](http://www.gwencates.com).

— Published on June 30, 2019



Scott Autton

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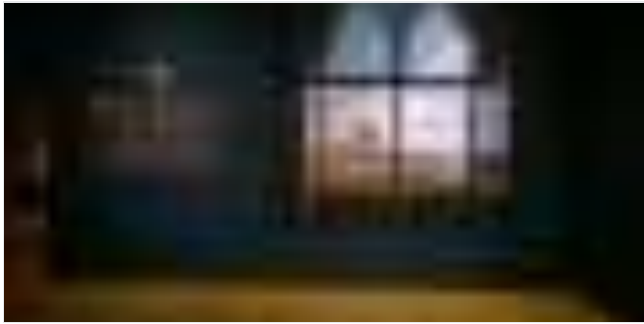
**Gwen Cates** · 3 days ago

I am excited to share information about my artwork and my upcoming exhibit at Salon @ the Granada in Los Angeles, CA.

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