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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.

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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.

<http://www.gwencates.com/biob.htm>

Question 1: "Cosmic Monologues" is your new solo exhibit series. Can you describe your inspiration for this series?

Many years ago, I took a class in astronomy at the University of Virginia. As my final class project, rather than write a paper, I painted a portrait of each of the planets in our solar system, describing aspects of each planet that made each sphere unique. I have continued to be fascinated by phenomena such as exoplanets, planets which have attributes that suggest that they could support life. Now 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. Little did I realize what an amazing adventure I was about to embark upon! The act of painting helps me to see the world in a new way. I can say things with paint that I cannot otherwise imagine.

Question 2: What goes into creating a series? Do you look for a certain number of pieces of artwork to be included for the story of your series to tell its story?

Like notes that become songs, or poems that are collected until there is a volume of work, each painting reveals a theme until there is a full exhibit. There are usually about thirty paintings in each solo exhibit, but the number varies. Each show has a life of its own, and the people who come and engage with the art also bring dynamism to the pieces. Some of my shows have been

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entirely large landscapes, one show in Washington DC featured only large figure studies. Other exhibits, particularly in London, have been more metaphysical with smaller canvases. Italians seem to like smaller figure studies, watercolors and etchings. Although I generally create with oil paints, I like to use a variety of mediums.

Cosmic Monologues is an ongoing series of acrylic paintings on canvas, often with collage elements. I moved on from my fascination with exoplanets and other cosmic adventures, to revelations about the newly revealed phenomena surrounding black holes. When I return from Los Angeles to my studio in Virginia, I shall continue my cosmic adventures with the Black Hole Series that I have included in the exhibit at Salon @ the Granada in Los Angeles.

Question 3: Can you describe how your style as an artist has evolved with your own personal life experiences?

Growing up on a farm and later owning rural property in Virginia has kept me in touch with the earth and has given me strength to meet life's challenges. The opportunity to attend colleges where I studied fine art gave me the skills that I needed to create *en plein air* paintings that express my passion for the landscape where I live. My style changed dramatically when I moved from Virginia to Santa Ynez, California. Because my husband and I were in the winemaking business, I took on the challenge of painting the wondrous vineyard vistas. Finally, I felt the need to move toward abstract work that allowed me to express inner visions that have evolved through a life rich in experience and observation. There is usually an inner prompting that will shift the current focus on my material. Before my *Vortex Series* was painted, I saw a shape on the white wall of my house. From a mundane viewpoint light was coming through the skylight above, but when seeing with the eyes of an artist I began to perceive it as a vortex filled with light and shadow. The shapes reappeared each morning until I pulled out charcoal and

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paper and began to draw. I realized I had received an iconic gift from my spirit guides that I could explore. As I continued to reexamine the theme of the vortex in my compositions, winged figures emerged and carried me to new adventures. The light pattern on the wall disappeared never to return.

Question 4: You split your time between Virginia and California. Do you find more of an inspirational connection at one home more than the other?

In both Virginia and California, I have had spacious, light filled studios in which to create bodies of work and prepare for exhibits. I also have had the support of family, friends and gallery owners on both coasts. In each location, I have walked in beauty and have had the good fortune to have the time and energy to respond to the opportunities that present themselves. The most difficult challenge that I encountered upon returning to Virginia from California was the loss of my husband of fifty-seven years. For some time I was unable to return to painting, but I began to explore the idea of exoplanets in drawings and paintings. It was when I started looking at the images of Black Holes that my creative impulse began to return to me. Painting these images has helped heal me from loss, and in my art studio, I have discovered ways of exploring a dramatic and very colorful world.

Question 5: When you're not in front of a canvas, what are some things that bring you the most enjoyment?

After painting, horses are my passion, and they frequently appear in my paintings. I live on Whiskey Ridge Farm near Charlottesville, Virginia, where I ride horseback with friends and family. We explore trails that follow and cross the Rivanna River, which borders my property. I also like swimming in my pool and canoeing on the river, especially when my grandchildren and daughter and sons-in-law are visiting. I love walking with my two magnificent German Shepherd dogs. The first thing I do in

the morning is to follow a path through the woods to my stable where I feed my two horses and turn them out in the pasture. Then the dogs and I walk across to my studio and I begin to plan my day.



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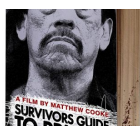
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