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THE ART OF DANIEL T. LOPEZ

I was born September 13, 1940 in Los Angeles, California. I moved to Fresno as a young child and lived there throughout my childhood and college years, where I earned my B.A. at CSU Fresno. My parents worked in the fields of Fresno, picking the crops in season. My mother, when not working in the fields, stayed at home raising and caring for eight children. I was the only son, born second in line. My parents raised us with love, devotion, and dignity. My family bonds grew strong. Work and play were uniquely woven into a fruitful family life.

My early artistic ability, while still developing technical skills, propelled me to think of my world in colors and shapes, in geometrical patterns, and multi-dimensional configurations. These are my earliest recollections of exploring the world around me, past its obvious physicality. Thus, I began to search for deeper understanding of my world and for a deeper spiritual meaning concerning my place in the cosmic whole of humanity. The Vietnam War interrupted my education. I was drafted in 1966 and after basic training, I was immediately sent to the front lines in Vietnam. I served as a Combat War Artist during my stay there. This brought me closer to the horrors of war and the killing of both innocent people and many soldiers that fought beside me. I portray many of these experiences in my Vietnam paintings, a series of twenty canvasses, 4 ft. by 5 ft. each. Upon completing my service in the Army, I continued my education, earning my Master’s degree from the University of Southern California. Soon thereafter, I entered the field of education, while always continuing my artwork. I am currently retired, after nearly forty years teaching, but today, I continue with my artwork. I found my niche in a variety of art forms, but I have devoted much of my work to painting murals. These can be seen throughout Sonoma County, California, where I have now lived for four decades.

My interest in art developed in childhood. One memorable moment is the art contest I entered and won in elementary school. I was in the fourth grade and winning sparked my ambition to become an artist. Even as a young child I looked for interesting ways to challenge my budding artistic skills. I remember my mother accompanying me to the local junkyard and together we combed through the junk looking for unusual and odd-looking items. We found such wonderful treasures, which I used to create art pieces. I began to think about ways art expressed the inner beauty that I felt about life, beyond that which my ordinary words could not describe. It became obvious to me that through art I was finding expression for an inner, deeper understanding of life, as it touched me every day. My home and environmental surroundings filled me with wonderment. The ordinary things I pondered allowed me to see the underside of them, in ways that ordinary things became extraordinary. My artistic expressions became a reflection of my inner sacred self; thus, art became my vehicle for discovering that everything around me could be honored through my artistic work.

I am drawn to aesthetics that express supreme beauty, such as Michelangelo’s “Pieta,” Bernini’s “Ecstasy of Saint Teresa,” and Dalí’s “Christ of Saint John of the Cross.” That which evokes thought, like Goya’s “The Third of May,” Picasso’s “Guernica,” Theodore Gericault’s “La Balsa de la Medusa” and Alfredo David Siqueiros’ “Torment of Cuauhtémoc,” inspires me. While the themes of these
artists vary, they capture and convey a deeper sense of who we are as human beings. They take us beyond a physical sense of self, to a place where we can examine the very essence of our being. Whether it is a search for life’s deeper meaning or a depiction of human struggle to free oneself from entanglements, the artists put it all before us, be it in its full beauty or raw reality.

As artists, we create visual images according to how we perceive our place in our universe and our connection to it. Our work evolves around our exploration of our nature and the questions that probe us to look further into ourselves. I hope to awaken, within me, the inner realization that we are all participants in the whole of this cosmic scheme. My work is my vehicle, through which I continuously search.

My art takes an in-depth view of the human condition. I view issues affecting us socially, politically, and culturally. My materials and processes vary but there are similarities in themes, messages, and conscious reflections. I strive to bring human connectivity between self and the universe. I attempt to bring the mysterious knowledge of our ancestors to the core of our present knowledge, thus allowing us to go beyond our self imposed limitations. I use art to bridge the gap between that which separates and alienates us from one another, thus, bringing us closer to healing, physically and spiritually. I hope to poke people to think critically, to look deep within the conscience and examine how as individuals we contribute to the problems that plague us, and to explore how we can work to solve these problems, collectively.

My series dealing with the Vietnam War propels the viewers to look into the abyss of their own souls and ask, ‘How can this happen?’ ‘How can I stop this human destruction?’ ‘How can I become a better human being?’

The “Sacred Feminine,” an archetype that transcends time and space, is central to many of my paintings. It symbolizes female/male energy, a spiritual duality, and an interplay of elements, which perfectly completes the female/male relationship. The idea of duality embodies the power to expand consciousness, to embrace love of one another, and to act out of compassion and understanding because we are acting out of conscious and spiritual wholeness.

The portrayal of Madonna and Child images, are, also, themes that are recurrent throughout my art. They represent the sacred bond between parent and child. More recently, I have included Father and Child images in several of my works. For me, this completes the idea of the “Holy Family.” I have portrayed these concepts, Mother and Child/Father and Child, to honor these sacred family bonds. It is nature that gives us the potential for life through our parents, and it is Father and Mother who bring us into being and into fruition. In the mystical sense, Father and Mother represent our duality. Understanding our duality gives us a deeper sense of our own nature as human beings. As an artist, I have dedicated myself to understanding this duality, thus, uncovering a deeper sense of myself, as I deepen my personal journey and spiritual awakening.

I strive to create an art that incorporates my upbringing, culturally, and historically. I want my art to reflect the mystical roots of my Indigenous legacy, which makes me today. Through visual imagery, I tell my story and that of many others who share my experience. I move beyond that which is personal. I expand my concepts to reflect the experience of others. Thus, it becomes a universal statement that speaks to all people across the expanse of humanity.