

Defining Moment

By Sandra Yeyati



Cradle Command 60" w x 30" h - Mixed-media oil painting 2012 © Renée Rey, artist

Last year, Renée Rey reached a turning point in her artistic career when she completed *Cradle Command*, a piece she affectionately calls "the blue painting." It took her 14 days to complete, but she has been preparing for it all of her life.

Moved by the 2011 tsunami in Japan, Rey's birthplace, she studied photographs of the devastation and was inspired to depict the children caught in the ruins. Four of them are featured prominently in the painting. "They are huddled together so they have each other, but at the same time there's a disconnect," she says.

The figures are separated from the buildings on the other side of the canvas, which is certainly what happened to many victims of the tsunami who lost their homes and everything they owned. Rey suggests that the separation also can be viewed from a more universal perspective. "It could be personal disconnect from yourself or other people, or from where you live or your culture. Maybe you don't feel comfortable. Women in certain cultures feel out of place," she says. The buildings may represent home or society—the establishment.

Rey likes to play with perceptions so that the viewer is unsure where things begin and where they end. She blurs edges, accentuating the space and distance between things. In *Cradle Command*, two hands are holding strings, but the hands seem disengaged from the person's body and the strings fade away before they actually attach to anything.

Rey sees the figure pulling the strings as the spiritual leader. "She's young, but there's a maturity there. She's looking right at you saying, 'I know the answer. Do you?'" She may not know all the answers, but she's connected to what's out there," Rey says.

From a very early age, Rey was fascinated by her Jewish heritage. Her favorite bedtime story was the story of Moses. "I connected with the concept of the hero. He saved people, and I always thought I was going to change the world," she says. The story taught Rey another lesson: "Jews were enslaved for 400 years, and they were able to get out. The underdog wins," she says. Rey's passion for her heritage propelled her to obtain a master's degree in Jewish education.

Cradle Command portrays a struggle, but it also suggests that we must stick together and protect everybody, especially the innocent. "It has to do with a belief in Jewish tradition that at any given time there are 36 righteous people on Earth, but you don't know who they are, so you have to defend and protect everyone," Rey explains.

The soldiers in the painting are defending the children. But in a surreal twist, they are toy soldiers. Although the kids are dealing with devastation and separation, they also are playing with toys. "Why do we give children army people to play with anyway? What is that teaching them?" Rey asks, enjoying the fact that the painting offers so much to discuss.



Vine-vera™
Resveratrol Skin Care

Drawing from another aspect of her past—an interior design degree from Parsons New School for Design, in New York City, where she ran a design business in the 1990s—the string and the lines extending out from the buildings in *Cradle Command* are suggestive of the grid lines of a floor plan. “I love the geometry of interior design and often incorporate it in my paintings,” Rey says.



2013 ©Renée Rey, Artist - Reverse the Rules

Creating lines of a different type, the people in the painting appear under a barrage of dripping paint, which seems appropriate within the context of a wet, chaotic tsunami. But from the artist’s perspective, it also represents freedom—the permission she gives herself to let accidents happen. “It’s letting the paint do what it wants to do,” Rey says.

Is *Cradle Command* a dark painting? On one hand, it depicts devastation and struggle. But its message and the artist’s intention are positive. “Sometimes you have to go through the bad to know that you’re connected to people. Look at 9/11 and how it brought everybody together in this country. When things go bad we can rally,” Rey says.

Faced with adversity, we must cling to each other and protect everyone. As Rey puts it, “I can be better, you can be better and we can be better together. It’s that higher purpose. It may be messy and dark to get there, but that’s part of it. And people are going through it at different times; you help bring someone up, and when you’re down, someone will pull you back up.”

Bringing together elements and techniques from past work, her Jewish studies, interior design and her childhood, Rey creates a meaningful work of art with a healing message. Never before has one of her paintings felt so personal and yet so universal. It goes a long way toward her principal goal: making a difference in the world through her art.

Sandra Yeyati is a writer and photographer in Naples, Florida. Reach her at SandraYeyati@gmail.com