

# Art and Artifacts

*by Dulce Maria Menendez*

In the morning after a cup of black coffee, she decided she was hungry and opted for the leftover egg roll and dumplings from the previous night. She looks for the chopsticks sticking out with the rest of the utensils and picks up the last of the dumplings and places it whole in her mouth. She lets the sauce squish around a little before swallowing. It quickly reminds her of other slippery things held against her tongue. She dismisses the memory and drinks a gulp of orange juice washing the memory and the taste from her mouth.

She leaves the kitchen for the living room and sits down by a window which is next to a table with several asian motifs including a lamp. The lamp is of a female figure hand carved from some type of fine wood, maybe it is mahogany and on top of the figure sits a lampshade. The lamp is about 3 feet tall and it was handed down to her from her sister which was handed down to her by her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law never liked the lamp which made her think it may have been a gift from someone she did not care for. Otherwise she would not have let it go so quickly after her husband died.

The lamp stands around other artifacts including a Korean teapot and cups. The original owner left to live in the USA after the Korean war and brought the set with them. It too was handed down to her by her sister.

She sits down and picks up a book leaving her cell phone as far away as possible. The book is a novel by Nathanael West titled The Day of The Locust. It is copyrighted 1939. The book was purchased 30 years ago during her first marriage when she used to collect books. She now collects art and artifacts.

One of the characters in the book is Homer Simpson. When he was introduced in an earlier chapter, she chuckled. She is in the part of the book where Homer is sitting in the back porch trying to contain his hands while watching a lizard.

She pauses and bookmarks the page and stares at the art on the wall to her right.

The wall has several oil paintings watching over a mantle which holds a wooden jewelry chest. To the right of the chest is a small sculpture of a native woman wearing a gold earring and necklace. To the left of the chest are two men dressed in traditional chinese garb playing a game. The figurines were superglued together after one of the moves from house to house. They are happily settled now each figure waiting for it to be their turn. The table used to contain a tiny board game but that was lost several decades earlier.

Further out of reach from the jewelry chest are a vase and a large glass plate standing erect. The plate is multicolored stained glass and was really meant as a bird feeder but never used for that purpose. It now serves as a backdrop for the little statued bust of the native woman who is patiently guarding the jewelry chest.

Above the jewelry chest are a diptych of two females who have their backs turned to the viewer and all we see are braids and a sliver of a profile. One is facing right and the other is facing left. Next to the diptych is a smaller painting of a beautiful jesus blue eyed modern male holding up flowers. To the left is a painting of an ominous hallway with a female dressed elegantly at the edge of the canvas. She waits by the stairway like so many heroines in an Edward Hopper painting.

The adjacent wall has a painting of a female whose face is contoured as if the f stop in the camera lense was too slow and the face is smeared with multiple eyes, noses, and mouths. The figure is

holding up a hand as if she was whisking away hair that blew into her face unexpectedly.

This is me.

I am her.

She is I.

These specific pieces are part of a collection and meticulously placed to serve a purpose. Even though the paintings are not really of me or anyone I know of, they were purchased to guard and keep my mother company.

My mother's ashes are inside the chest which sits on the mantle.

The chest itself was made by my grandfather who was a carpenter and it was given to my mother as a gift. My mother kept her jewelry in the chest for decades. She had some nice pieces since my father's side of the family were all jewelers.

The chest was also handed down to me by my sister before my mother's death. When my mother died, my sister handed me the ashes as well and we decided to place her inside the chest which served our mother so many years of safe keeping of the jewelry my father would bring home.

Sometimes he'd bring home artifacts from the pawn shop where he worked such as the figurine of the two gentlemen dressed in chinese garb, or the little painting of Jesus on the cross which hangs next to the door and the entry of the house I currently reside in the Midwest.

The little painting of the crucifix is next to a painting or it could be a photograph of el morro de cuba and next to that is a little wooden saint of Joseph holding up a baby Jesus.

To the right of the entry door there is an oil painting of a raggedy American flag. The flag is waving and it looks like it's swept in sorrow. The painting itself is not varnished like the other paintings. It has rich brushstrokes and thick oil paint.

Next to the flag is the window I mentioned earlier. Above the table in the corner of the living room with the Asian motifs and lamp is another painting by the same artist who painted the flag. This time it is a painting of a gas mask and next to the painting of the gas mask is a smaller painting of three little birds chirping. Next to that is a print of a modern day Mona Lisa in suburbia.

Now that you know that she is I and I is the she mentioned earlier, here is a list of the artists in the collection.

The painting of the distorted face is by Megan Elizabeth Read. The painting is a self-portrait. I bought it as soon as I saw it was listed. The connection to the painting reminds me of who I was when everything fell apart. It is there to remind me that I am still here.

The painting of the beautiful blond male holding up the flowers is by Alessandro Tomassetti. The connection to this painting is spiritual and the male figure holding up the flower serves as a guardian angel to my mother.

The painting of the woman in a dress standing by the edge of the canvas is by Dianne Gall. The subject in the painting reminds me of me again. This time I am waiting by a stairwell for my life to begin. The past was ominous and the future is even more scary but little did I know then. It captures a moment in time when we decide to live our life or fall out of it.

The sculpture of the native female is by Thomas Blackshear. When I was about 13 my father brought home a large figuring made of clay of a native american male from the pawn shop.

My mother loved it and she proudly displayed it on a coffee table in our living room. One day I decided to surprise my mother and clean the house. When I moved the statue to dust the table, it broke. When my mother came home from working all day in the factory and saw that I had broken her prized possession she became very upset and started to cry. I didn't understand at the time how much the gift from my father had meant to her. I had never seen her cry like that before.

There were a lot of things tied up in that statue which I will never really know. Whenever I see the little Blackshear bust of the female figure elegantly displaying her necklace and earrings I think of my mother. It helps me heal from the anguish and torment my father brought upon us all those years ago. What broke that day was not my mother's most valued possession. It represented my father's broken promises and the beginning of the end.

The paintings of the crucifix is by an unknown artist although it could be a renaissance missing artifact for all I know and the rest of the paintings and artworks are by Stephen Wright, Viktoria Savenkova, Gregory Ferrand, Jeff Bess, and I have an abstract artwork which I did not mention earlier by Grace Cavalieri also hanging in the living room.

