

# SILKWORM

The Magazine of Silk Painters International

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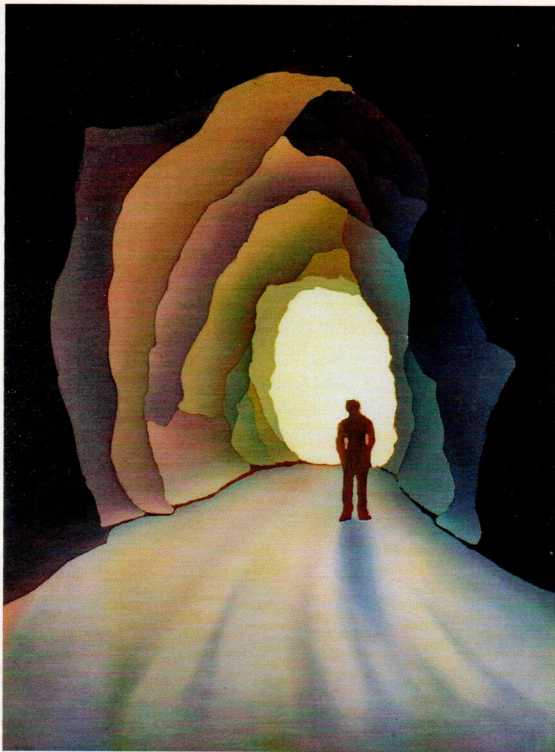
Dorothy Bunny Bowen  
Rozome Landscapes

James Cusmano Paints  
Landscapes on Silk

Recap On How to  
Become a Distinguished  
Silk Artist (DSA)

*Sandstone and Turquoise,  
along San Juan River Bluff, UT*  
Dorothy Bunny Bowen





*Passage by Dorothy Bunny Bowen*

Inspired by a visit to the Gilman Tunnels in the Jemez Mts, NM. Part of the series on transformation, passage.

## From the Editor's Desk

Time has flown and it's autumn already. Being a Los Angelean, there's not much change in the landscape or weather. It's almost always the same, beautiful but static. Okay. Sometimes it is downright dull.

At times like these, I remember the crisp and cooler days of my youth when I would watch the leaves fall in Grant (now Millennium) Park on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. The Art Institute had several impressionist paintings in their permanent collection. The dappled light of the spring palettes of the masters were beautiful and the colors of the trees turning from green to red, orange and gold were explosive – creating a springboard for my own creativity. Present amongst many of the paintings were landscapes. Lush or barren, solitary or filled with activity and life, landscapes have always had a special place in art. It has been said that landscapes are the most popular form of art, the most often purchased.

There is something about the landscape and its ability to infect the psyche. In this issue of the *Silkworm*, we explore the sublime landscape. That is the landscape that causes us to pause and to breathe and to maybe, for a moment, come to rest inside of ourselves, free from the worries and cares that life consists of.

*“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new sights, but in looking with new eyes.”* That's a paraphrase of a passage written by French author Marcel Proust. It is often used as a quote for travelers. But Proust was actually writing about art and artists. It was an idea that through art and the artist's vision, we could see with new eyes.

In this issue, Bunny Bowen and James Cusmano will help us to do just that. They are both world travelers and artists and through their paintings, they give us a vision of how they see the world thus broadening our vision.

By the time you read this, the SPIN Festival is either underway or already gone. Kaki writes about her first experience of Festival. Breccia writes about new landscapes.

We hope you enjoy the view.

Tunizia Abdur-Raheem, Editor

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If you have photographs of your art that you would like to have showcased in the *Silkworm*, send photos with your name and the name of the piece. The photo size should be minimum 5"x 7" and 300 dpi for best printing.

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# Outer Doors and Inner Worlds

## Dorothy Bunny Bowen

with Tunizia Abdur-Raheem

*Ripple in still water*

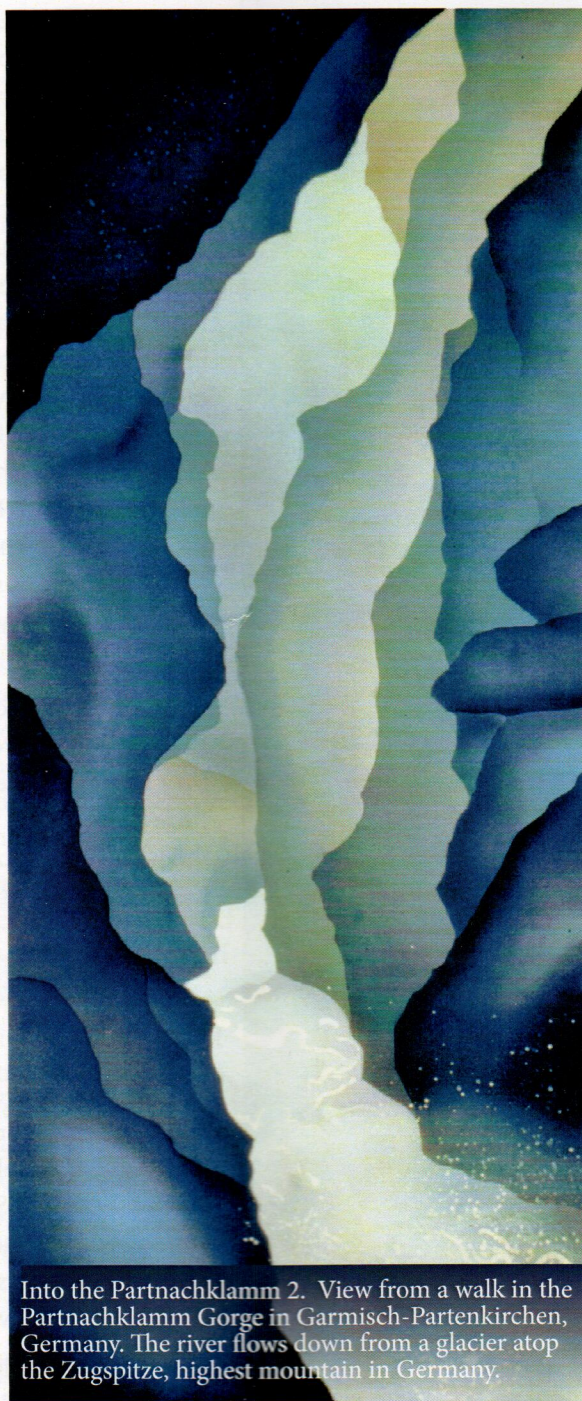
*When there is no pebble tossed*

*Lyrics by The Grateful Dead*

**D**orothy Bunny Bowen – she prefers Bunny – makes art that touches the internal and the eternal. Her paintings present the natural world and its elements, from the mundane to the sublime. She paints nature from views not normally shared on canvas – a view of a river framed by trees, a view of mountains seen from the cracks of ruins. According to Bunny’s website and her descriptions of her art, she has observed and painted the nuances of passages, transformations and doorways, both outer doors and inner one’s – reflections of the interior journey we all take as we pass through the dimensions of this world.

She is a formally trained artist, having studied oil painting at Randolph College in Lynchburg, Virginia – a women’s college at the time. She is a native of Virginia. Her Master of Arts from the University of New Mexico is in Art History. Not finding much interest in so-called classical art forms, she specialized in non-European art, including Asian, African Native American and the arts of Oceania. Her Master’s thesis was on Navajo pictorial weaving.

While attending graduate school, she took a class with Elizabeth Boyd, who was the



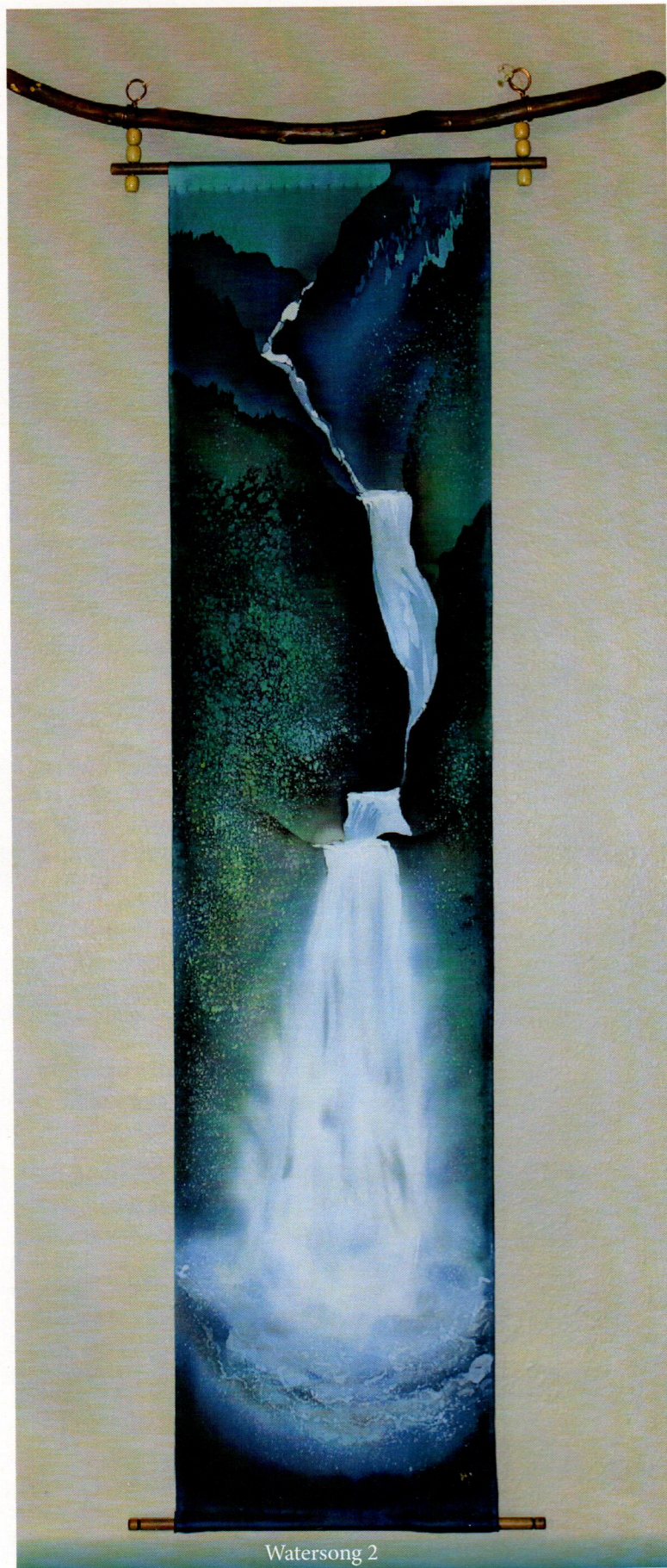
Into the Partnachklamm 2. View from a walk in the Partnachklamm Gorge in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. The river flows down from a glacier atop the Zugspitze, highest mountain in Germany.

first curator of Spanish Colonial Art at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Through Boyd, she received a grant to study Spanish Colonial textiles at museums around the country. For a time, Bunny worked as an historian rather than an artist. Until she discovered batik.

“Over a period of about 10 years, I studied dyes as an art historian, but never dyed. I was trying to figure how to make images with dyes, when an Australian artist-in-residence (Jeffrey Service) at my children’s school offered a free class in batik. That week in 1980 changed the course of my journey as an artist. I began using fiber-reactive dyes on cotton. Years later Judith Roderick introduced me to silk painting, and in 1999 Betsy Sterling Benjamin (now Kiranada) introduced me to rozome.”

Both Roderick and Benjamin are members of SPIN. In fact, Kiranada is teaching at the 2016 SPIN Festival. Bunny and Judith are members of the same SPIN chapter in New Mexico, the New Mexico Silk Painters Guild which has been around since the early 1990s. Bunny believes,





Watersong 2

“This is a very supportive group for both beginners and veterans!”

Rozome is the batik technique used by the Japanese. It is similar to the batik for which the Indonesians are famous in that they both use wax as a resist. However, the Indonesian form seems to be more focused on stamping wax onto the fabric using tjaps or using tjantings (cantings) to draw. The fabric is then immersed in dye baths.

While rozome artists can use these tools, they also use numerous types of brushes to apply the wax and dyes after the fabric has been sized with a soybean and water wash (gojiru). This sizing and wax layering makes the dyes harder to penetrate the fabric often requiring the artist to scrub in the dyes. This scrubbing in of the dyes creates subtle gradations of color as one shade blends into another. This progression of color lends itself to the natural environment, mimicking the rich ombré that light makes as a light sky wanders into dark outer edges or how a turquoise sea grows blacker as the landscape moves farther away. About this, Bunny states, “I was drawn to the human figure and portraiture as an oil painter in the 1960s. When I began learning batik, I loved the way colors ran around and over wax, and that lent itself more to landscape. And, I had moved out west, where sweeping landscapes are so very much a part of our lives.”

Bunny says about the history of the art, “Wax resist silks have been preserved in Nara in the Shosoin and they date from the 8th century. The term then was Rokechi, now the word Rozome is a shortened form of the word Roketsuzome. In the 20th century, artists in Kyoto revived this “lost” art and have developed specialized tools and technical processes to bring it to an incredible level of skill and beauty.” Bunny recommends Benjamin’s book, “The World of Rozome” as an excellent source book.

Bunny attended the World Batik Conference in 2005 which was coordinated by Benjamin and held at the Massachusetts College of Art. About this conference, Bunny remarks, “She [Kiranada] spent two years of her life doing this. She put on a wonderful conference at Mass-Art. It was such a labor of love. I probably would go again if there was one.”

Speaking highly of Kiranada as a teacher, Bunny says, “She’s a wonderful teacher and mentor. I have visited



Japan three times on study tours with Kiranada, and have also been to Bali with her.”

She enjoyed her travels in Asia. “In Japan we visited prominent rozome artists in their studios, and many did demonstrations for us. It was wonderful to be in a culture where textiles (kimono, scrolls, and screens) were honored as fine art. They were generous in sharing their art and studios with us, and we connected in a deep way despite language and cultural differences. My traveling companions were also treasures... I feel very connected to them via textiles and am still in touch with many.”

In 2005 and 2007, Bunny was invited to speak on soywax at the Kuala Lumpur International Batik Convention in Malaysia.”

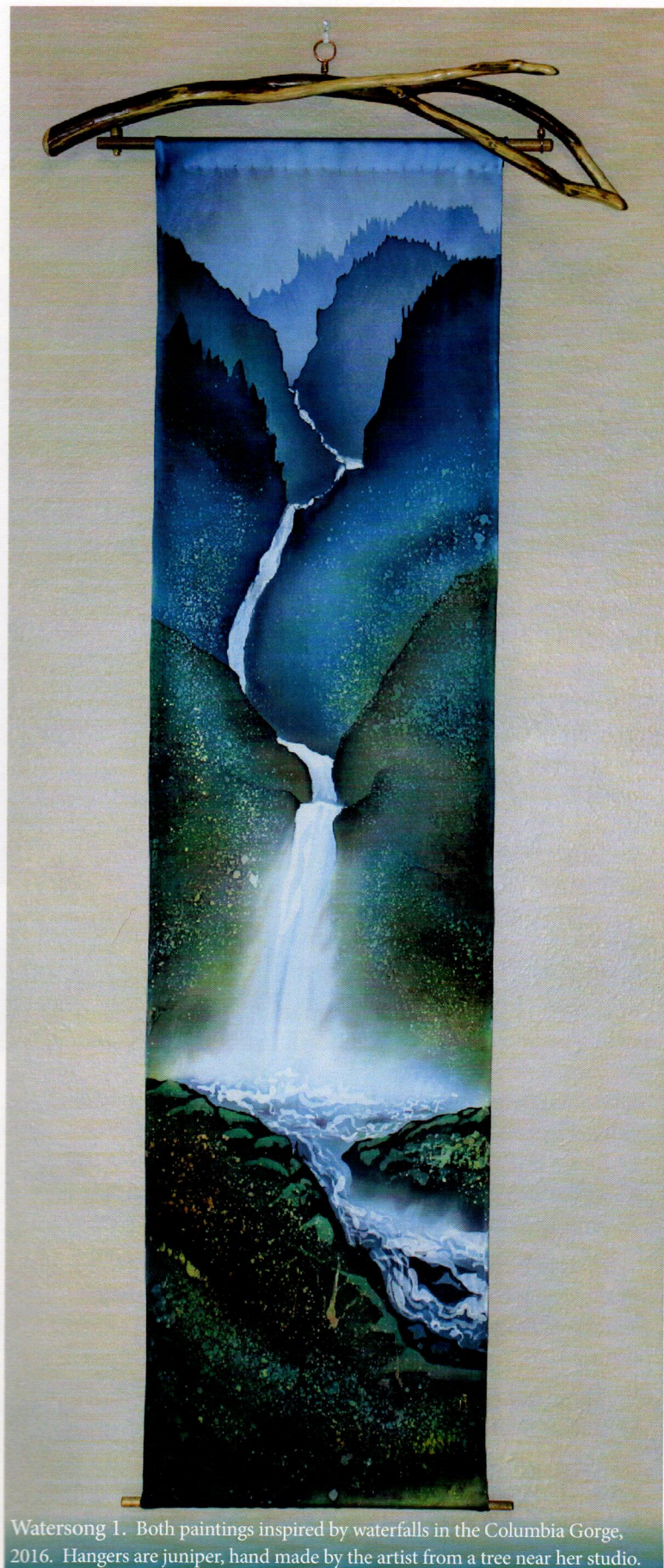
When Bunny approaches her projects, she brings her skill and knowledge of the tools and materials of rozome as well as the techniques. For applying the wax, she uses “Japanese Ro brushes, made of sheep hair, perfectly pointed to give a calligraphic wax stroke, as well as wide flat Japanese brushes for filling in backgrounds. I also have several Indonesian cantings which Rita Trefois taught me how to use.” For dyeing, she uses “several sizes of Japanese surikome, marubake, shikebike and hikezome brushes made of badger hair and deer hair.

She uses standard artist’s stretchers and pushpins for stretching her silk. She uses rolls of kimono silk and also shinshi (bamboo fabric stretchers) in the 15-inch width of the kimono silk. “For serious work I love kimono silk, in various weaves, which I bought by the bolt in Kyoto. I still have a good stock of it. For scarves I like charmeuse and jacquard from Exotic Silks.”

As for her dyes, some are familiar to the average silk painter. “I use Dupont acid dyes and Japanese acid dyes on silk. The dyes are set by steaming. I use a horizontal steamer built years ago by my husband.”

She can use many layers of wax in her paintings. “I might go as many as 20 layers without removing the wax. I usually use a 50-50 mixture of beeswax and soywax. Much of it comes out in the steamer, but in the end I do take it to the dry cleaner. He assures me that he has a distiller which reclaims the PERC.\* When I was doing batik on cotton, I used fiber reactive dyes, and I boiled out the wax. Acid dyes, however, will not stand up to boiling.”

She, of course, finds themes for her paintings in nature. “Often in nature, something will catch my eye



Watersong 1. Both paintings inspired by waterfalls in the Columbia Gorge, 2016. Hangers are juniper, hand made by the artist from a tree near her studio.



and I will begin noticing a pattern of similar things. I've long been working with the idea of seeing through trees, for instance. And then there are things that happen, such as tree die-off and forest fires." In the same vein as artist Georgia O'Keeffe, she likes to magnify the small. "I love to spot a small thing and make it bigger, so that others will see it too."

She also finds inspiration in the books she is reading. "Sometimes in a song, poem or book as well as visually. I

might be reading Meister Eckhart or Wendell Berry or Mary Oliver, for example, which causes my eyes to open to the miracle which we know as life." She says she likes to read environmental authors,

Orion Magazine, Medieval mystics, Japanese poet Basho. "I'm a fan of Krista Tippett's "On Being," a National Public Radio (NPR) podcast. She is currently reading "What to Remember When Waking," by David Whyte and "On Becoming Wise," by Krista Tippett.

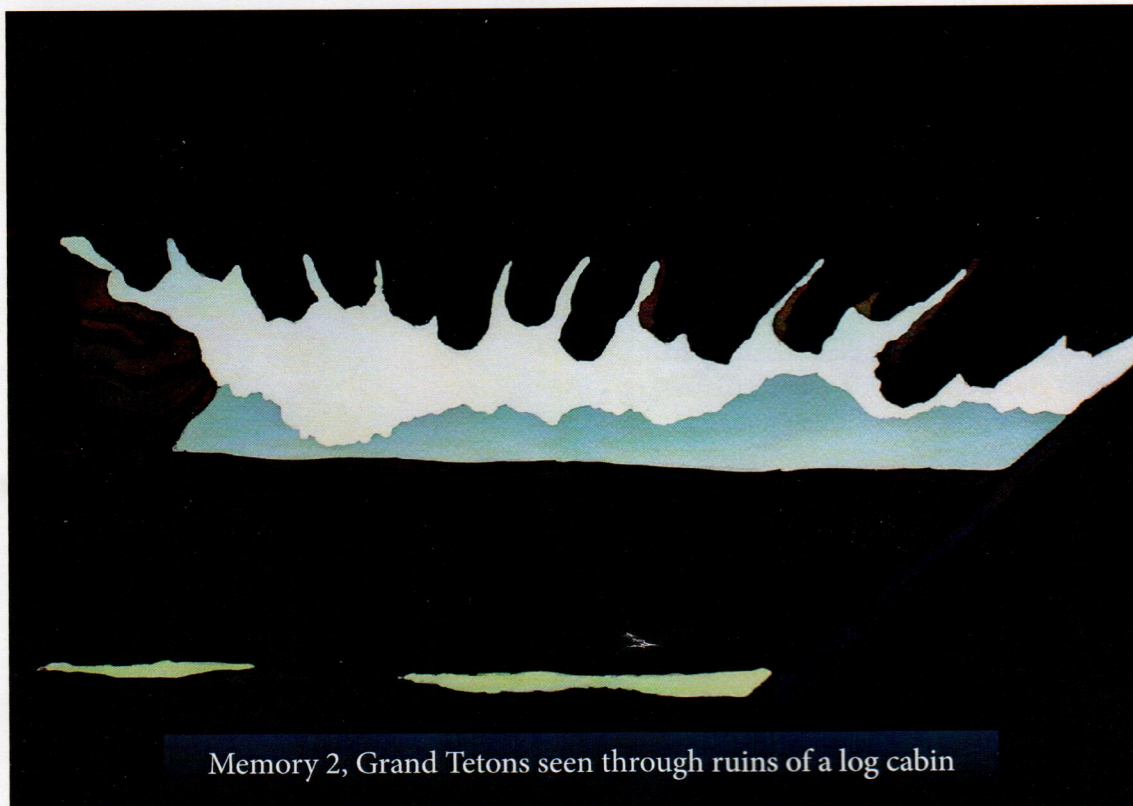
A simple thing like water also inspires. "Having lived in the desert for half a century, I love water; tiny streams, waterfalls, monsoon thunderstorms, soft snow on pointy yuccas."

About her home, she says, "We live in the high desert of central New Mexico, at about 5500 feet. Within 5 miles are the 10,700 foot high Sandia Mountains, our "front yard." Thirty miles to the northwest are the Jemez Mountains and about three miles to the west is the Rio Grande, which flows through a cottonwood bosque. Within

about 45 minutes we can go from the river, up through yuccas, cactus, pinyon-juniper forest, to Douglas fir, aspen, and ponderosa forest. We regularly see bobcats and coyotes in our yard, as well as many species of birds, reptiles (yes, that includes rattlesnakes!) and once even a bear. In the fall and spring, Sandhill cranes pass over on their migrations."

She loves to travel. "I love road trips - used to love camping too. I prefer going places where there are not

many people, though I've enjoyed trips to crowded cities as well." She's traveled to Belgium, Germany, Scotland, Yorkshire, Malaysia, Japan, Bali and many places in the United States. "I



Memory 2, Grand Tetons seen through ruins of a log cabin

love the landscape of Scotland, the rain forests in Oregon, and the artists in Japan."

Does she have plans for painting other locales? She states, "I have been working lately on ideas from a trip last fall to Oregon where I went on a day hike in the Three Sisters Wilderness with Barry Lopez, an environmental writer. I've done some waterfalls from Northern California and the Columbia Gorge, also from that trip."

Creating art outdoors is always challenging. Rozome is probably a bit more considering the types of equipment one may need. Does she set up a place for herself outdoors? She does not. Instead she says, "I might do quick sketches, with notes on color. Often I work from photos I have taken, and sometimes I use Photoshop to modify, cut and paste, and do compositions from the



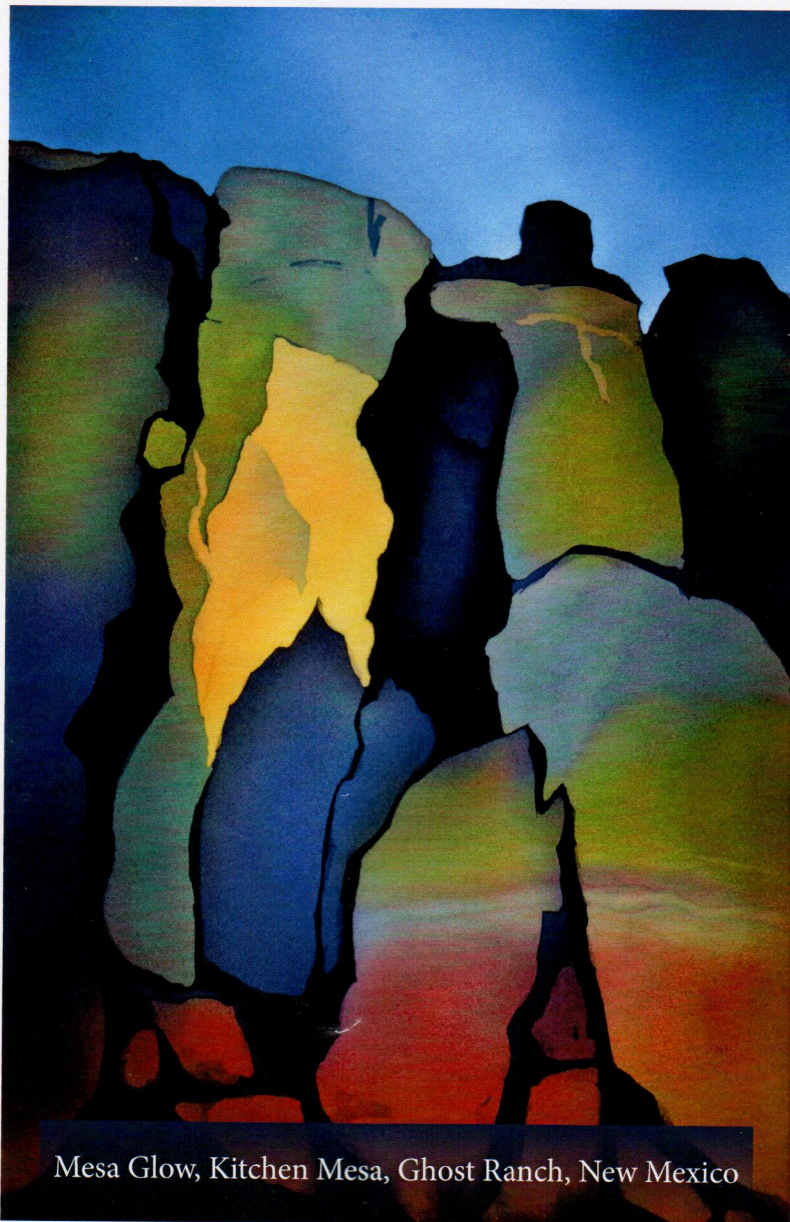
photos. I haven't yet figured a safe way to heat wax without electricity, so when away at a cabin in the mountains I do studies in acrylic or watercolors. Then I might later use these studies for rozome."

With such a methodical process, a student might learn best by being at the elbow of a master. About teaching rozome, Bunny says, "I taught workshops at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, New Mexico, for 14 years, as well as in my studio and other venues around the country. My last class was at the 2014 Silk in Santa Fe SPIN conference. I think now at 70, I have retired from teaching. She goes on to explain, "To teach, you have to take the studio with you. There's an incredible amount of stuff that goes along with teaching - stretchers, wax pots and all of that. Then, if you're flying... it gets very hard. I just decided after the last SPIN that it would be a nice way to end."

She does still sell her work, however, doing three local shows a year and showing regularly at Hoot Art Gallery in Placitas, New Mexico.

When asked about making a living as an artist, she laughs. "Somebody once asked me, 'Can you make a living at this?' I said, 'No, you can't make a living, but you can make a life.'

She's also been a gallery owner. "Throughout the years, I've been a gallery owner - and that's not a way to make a living either, by the way," she laughs. I was a gallery owner for 9 years, with partners in Albuquerque. Then I was in a couple of coops. And I am working at a gallery



Mesa Glow, Kitchen Mesa, Ghost Ranch, New Mexico

now. It's not really a coop but I share in the work and costs." She says she's fortunate that she and her husband have made enough to manage and now they are retired.

"Making a living at art is really hard," she says. I think very few people manage to actually support themselves with art. But you can have a very full and wonderful life as an artist. And one that's especially rich because of the people. Like I said earlier, going to Japan - it was the fellow travelers as much as anything else. Going with Kiranada. She's a wonderful teacher and wonderful mentor. And the others were equally fine artists as well - at the top of their game. They were all such sharing people and open to learning new things and making new friends. I think that's the kind of life you end up with when you are an artist."

Dorothy Bunny Bowen graces us with her work, causing us to stand still for

a fixed moment in time. She seems to have mastered this art, although she is humble. When asked how long it has taken her to master the art of rozome, she stated, "I'm still working on that, having begun in 1999!"

So, what gets her up and going in the morning? "After coffee?" she asks. "I'm a morning person. That's when I have energy and feel creative. Sometimes I walk with friends, but my favorite thing is to go straight to the studio and just sit and listen and think."

\* (Perchloroethylene or PERC is a chemical that has been determined to be hazardous to people and the environment.)

For a demonstration of Bunny's rozome process and other tidbits, visit her website, [www.db-bowen.com](http://www.db-bowen.com).