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Image courtesy of Andrea Roby King

Tatiana Zaits' "Pawn to Queen" (44x59 Oil, Acrylic).

150 YEARS OF WONDERLAND

Roby King to showcase works inspired by Carroll's classic

BY LUCIANO MARANO
Bainbridge Island Review

It's been 150 years since Alice first fell down that infamous rabbit hole, but she and the rest of the Wonderland gang — as well as their controversial and enigmatic creator — continue to inspire and enchant audiences of all ages.

Lewis Carroll (actually the pen name of author Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), a native of Cheshire, England, was an author, mathematician, deacon and photographer, who wrote two books featuring his Wonderland characters, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland"

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(1865) and the now lesser-known sequel "Through the Looking-Glass" (1871).

Written when he was 33, the first book reportedly received negative reviews initially (though the illustrations which accompanied it were apparently highly praised), and it was not until Carroll's sequel was published that the series gained popularity, eventually becoming the cultural staple it is today. The books and characters have inspired dozens of film and television adaptations — including the iconic 1951 Disney and 2010 Tim Burton versions — as well as graphic novels, paintings, video games, stage plays, musicals, ballets, statues and songs.

In honor of the beloved book's anniversary, the Roby King Gallery will host a special themed exhibition, showcasing the Wonderland-inspired works of nearly 20 artists through the month of December. The pieces on display are as varied as the colorful cast of characters Alice meets in her travels, with some artists creating more literal depictions of Carroll's world and others showing off their own take on the fable.

Andrea Roby King, owner of the downtown Winslow gallery, put out a tentative call for work after reading of the novel's anniversary. Though she had curated themed shows before, she said, gathering works for shows featuring Americana themes, pears and roads, this is the gallery's first purely pop culture-inspired group show.

"I read [a] New York Times article and I thought, 'This would be fun,'" she said, adding that many of the gallery's artists were immediately excited to participate.

"Some responded to the actual storyline," she explained. "Some responded to a lot of the very well-known quotes [and] phrases, things we would just say, and some responded to the imagery. So it was coming from all different directions."

The staple Bainbridge art spot typically specializes in small group or solo shows, Roby King said, but something a little different seemed in order both for the holiday show and in honor of the book's anniversary. Participating artist Pamela Wachtler said that the story remains popular today because



Image courtesy of Andrea Roby King

Pamela Wachtler's "White Rabbit" (6x6, Oil).

it resonates with the audience on many levels at once.

"It's dark but it's also light, like childhood," she said. "Especially when you're little, the world seems kind of confusing, like, 'Why do people do what they do?'"

"It's kind of like Jane Austen," she added. "It's still relevant today. The human condition is still the same as it was a thousand years ago."

Fellow contributing artist Tatiana Zaits was, at first, reticent to participate, saying she feared it would be too difficult to overcome the established imagery associated with the story and add her own take. She ultimately decided the answer was to recreate a scene not as widely known from the second book in her own bold, graphic style.

"The story's related not to just kids," she said. "It's all about our opportunity to make choices."

In both of the books, Zaits explained, Alice has a goal or a dream and must follow through in its pursuit through obstacles and adversaries, a truly universal experience.

"I really didn't want to fall for the normal, known symbols of the story," she said. "I wanted to find some kind of different view on the story."

Roby King Gallery is located at 176 Winslow Way East and is open from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Visit www.robyskinggallery.com for more information.

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