



Color-Charged Energy

THE ART OF SEYBURN ZORTHIAN

“**L**IVING AMIDST THE SANTA YNEZ HILLS, trees, grapevines, and animals, I get the feeling that Nature is feeding me,” says painter Seyburn Zorthian. “Painting definitely powers my life. If I don’t paint, I don’t feel complete.”

The majesty of Santa Ynez wine country animates and completes Zorthian’s art for good reason. Her abstract paintings are created in a studio on the grounds of Solvang’s Buttonwood Farm Winery and Vineyard, where rolling hills, oceans of light, sun-warmed earth, and grapevines fill her senses. (The mother of a grown son, Zorthian is the daughter of Buttonwood founder Betty Williams.)

While Zorthian’s work graces the Buttonwood tasting room and adorns Buttonwood labels, it is worth noting that she is an internationally recognized artist. In 1974, in her twenties, she traveled to Japan to study the art of calligraphy known as shodou with Shiryu Morita, a master of the form. Shodou involves huge brushes and ink that is ground on stone and mixed with water; the canvases often feature monumentally sized characters from the Japanese language. “The shodou masters were writing characters that were six or seven feet high,” Zorthian explains, “and to them each one held great philosophical meaning.”

Inspired and energized by working in shodou, Zorthian practiced and refined her brushwork from 1975 until the late 1990s. Since then, she has been painting, exhibiting, and selling abstract color compositions. Zorthian’s work has been shown at the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena, California, the Municipal Museum in Kyoto, Japan, and this year at the Galerie Tendri in Paris, France. In



The artist’s studio (above) is in a barn at the Buttonwood Farm Winery and Vineyard. Large Japanese shodou calligraphy brushes (right).


Photographs by Deja Hsu.

ART

Santa Barbara, Zorthian's work has been in numerous exhibitions and she currently shows at Indigo on State Street. She has also exhibited extensively with Art of Ink in America, an international contemporary calligraphy association.

"When I went to China last year to participate in a grand show at the Shanxi Historical Art Museum in Xi'an," she recalls, "I was surrounded by mostly Asian artists who had spent their lives pursuing an artistic extrapolation of the calligraphy they had grown up with." While Zorthian is currently more interested in exploring a wider range of elements in her abstract compositions, decades of expressive brushwork continue to influence her aesthetic.

"People react to my paintings as people do to Rorschach tests," Zorthian notes. "Some people will say, 'Oh, the soaring shapes and colors remind me of birds in flight,' while I never had any intention of creating an image that would suggest that. But that's fine with me, as everyone's interpretations are just as valid as my intentions."

The main brush stroke that has become the Buttonwood wine label icon was chosen from various brush designs inspired by grapes and vines that Zorthian brought in from the vineyard. "Although I love to see my work in stores and at people's houses," she concludes, "I would paint even if I never showed my work to anyone."  KYLE RODERICK

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"Dawn and Dusk" rotating screen (69" x 81"), a collaboration between Seyburn Zorthian and Bud Tullis. Sumi, watercolor, and acrylic on linen, mounted on wood panels. The frame is maple with purpleheart detail.

Screen art courtesy of Seyburn Zorthian.