

# Roses And Rooflines

Marie Massey's paintings record still, magic moments of fleeting images.

*By Suzanne Smith Arney*



*Suenos de Primavera*, oil on canvas 36" x 48"

Since her first visit to Taos with a group of artists six years ago, painter Marie Massey has returned to the legendary art colony on a regular basis, usually three or four times a year. "Taos is centered around art and creativity," says Massey. "It's a gentle place, spiritual." Those same words could be used to describe a Massey painting.

**Adobe Rose** is just such a scene. "The scent of roses in sunshine reached out and grabbed me," Massey says. "I had to pull off the road." She had found a tangle of overgrown roses billowing around a church window, and was struck by the contrasts of light and shadow—the soft mass of red flowers and the straight, diagonal of the teal blue roofline; the velvety petals and rough adobe. "It was simple, but so dramatic," she recalls. Back in her studio, Massey sought to reproduce that unassuming, overall impression rather than a replication of each flower. "I had to respect its simplicity," she explains. "I had to let it be."

A similarly gentle prospect is presented in *Suenos de Primavera*. Waves of bright golden daffodils flutter like butterflies in a light spring breeze. This painting is twice the size of *Adobe Rose*, and more consciously composed for effect. A mélange of landscape elements is skillfully combined to create a lyrical tribute to yellow's radiant glow. "It's the color of joy and hope," says Massey. The season is further defined by cherry trees just beginning to bloom; a splashing river is indicated by the distant willows. *Suenos de Primavera* exemplifies Massey's recent attention to what she calls 'concept paintings.' "I'm experimenting with big, shaped areas. Lots of triangles lead back through the painting. Flowers aren't detailed, they're brushstrokes, and there's no architecture. It leaves a lot to the imagination, and allows viewers their dreams of Spring."

*Mission Gate* is nearly opposite in its intimate size and its focus on an unusually shaped wooden door. The curve of the door dances with the curled edge of the Spanish roof tiles, the



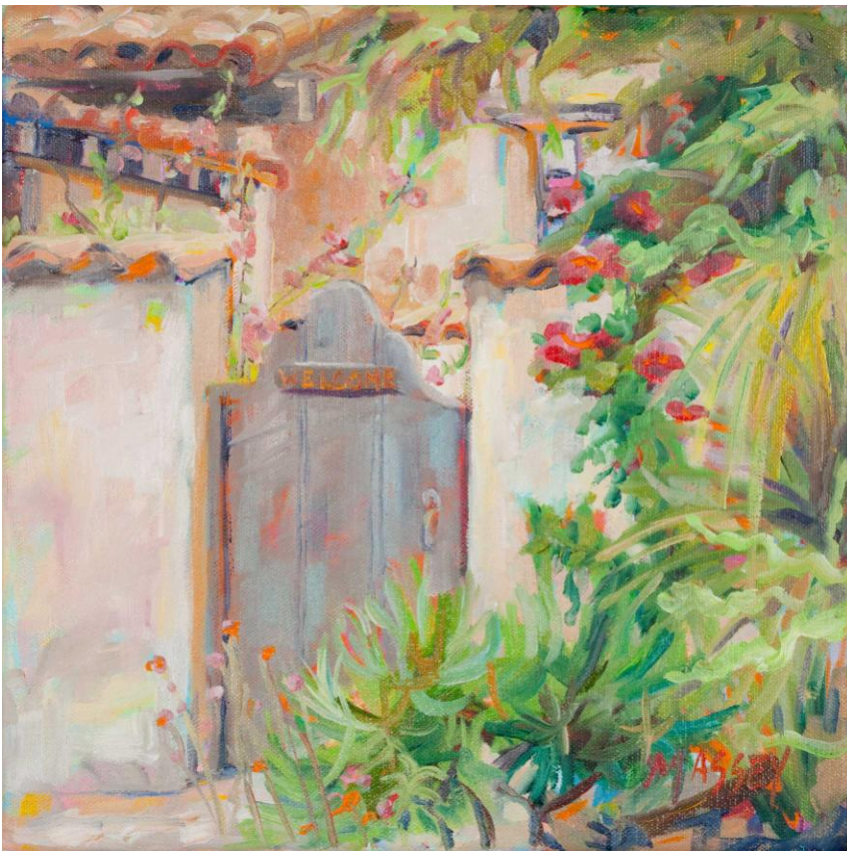
undulating spill of flowers and leaves, and the soft burble of nearby doves. These indolent loops are countered and emphasized by the angular planes of the roof and walls. Massey can idealize a scene, perfect discomforting details. In this case, she added a sign of welcome to the once exclusive door, an invitation to enter the inner garden and find a perfect oasis there.

“Serenity is definitely hard to find sometimes,” says Massey. “When I paint, I travel in my mind to that moment, find the stillness, the essence of the place and of my experience there. That’s what I hope to convey in the final product.”

Viewers can just let their imagination wander into the painting. But at the same time that Massey returns to the emotional pull of the scene, her artist’s brain is determining choices like focal point, texture and shapes in the painting, colors and their value. Each of these considerations must be balanced against the others, and against the intended conclusion. Every addition or subtraction must be performed seamlessly. She is making a mental schema of her view, a detailed map of directions to guide us to that still point of resolution.



*Adobe Rose*, oil on canvas 24” x 24”



*Mission Gate*, oil on canvas, 12” x 12”

Massey often combines opposites to reach a peaceful destination. Angular rooflines are softened by climbing roses; constructed buildings and objects offset wild nature; highlights of sunshine in the foreground melt away into cool; flat land rises to distant hills; thorny stems end in delicate petals; water sparkles and sunshine gathers in still pools. Contrasting colors, expertly used, add life to her paintings—the complementary colors of green and magenta in *Adobe Rose*, the juxtaposition of warm and cool hues, and the nuanced values of light and dark. Each of these partnerships create a vibrancy in the visual perception and mood of the painting.

Taking advantage of this color theory, and of Taos’s famed brilliant light, Massey builds up her paintings in layers—one or two undercoats of acrylic, often in a warm hue, followed with oil paint in the undercoat’s complement, that is, its opposite on the color wheel. “This contrast makes color pop, and it lends a sense of mystery,” she says. “I use the same value (degree of light or dark) in each color, so it seems to disappear. But you still see it on some level. The under-paint comes through almost translucently brilliant.”

*Wine Garden*’s paint application is brushy, with plenty of interplay between layers of acrylic and oil, and the canvas’s large size gives it room to breathe. The result is a lively, expressionistic feeling. An open-air restaurant is ready to receive customers. It’s the height of summer and everything’s sparkling.



Koi glint and water splashes from a copper fountain. Grapevines trail from the arbor lattice above. The bright sun electrifies the reeds in the fountain and bleaches color from the cotton tablecloth and metal chairs. Past pots of geraniums a door opens out to a patio. Massey has fun with this scene, inventing tiny pictures within the picture to find and enjoy. There's a sculptural fountain with its lively cherubs. (Massey has two little boys of her own for angelic inspiration.) And the arrangement of a bottle of wine, stemware and accessories set out on the table is lovely.

These paintings are indulgently subjective. They return to an experience that lifted Massey out of her everyday world and concerns to be reminded of the beauty that is all around, waiting to be recognized. She also does commissioned work, enjoying the challenge of seeing a buyer's perspective and then bringing it to life. "It gives me something to think about," she says. Her vista is broadened by the need to see from a new position.



*Wine Garden*, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"



*Mystic Muse* acrylic 30" x 24"

"My newest work contains more expressionism," relates Massey. "I feel completely competent at this point in my painting ability and skill. My challenge is to transfer the vision and feelings I have about a subject to the canvas with drama and beauty."

The most daring of these new paintings is *Mystic Muse*, created during Taos's "Summer of Love 2009." Massey painted the hippie guitar player during an intense and inspired twelve-hour period. The red under-layer fills the picture with passion, isolating the musician who is untouchably cool, absorbed in interweaving her melody and message. She is her own muse. "I love color," says Massey. "I gravitate to reds and yellows, but I also love teal and purple. Color is fun! It is the icing on the cake, but it is not critical. What is critical is value and composition." In this painting, the center position of the lone figure, completely surrounded by red; the concealment of her face; her contour lines always running inward; her body relaxed—all these compositional decisions reiterate the message of a mysterious, private and transcendent inner spirit.

"I have always been fascinated with capturing something fleeting and magical in my paintings," says Massey. Like the young woman with her guitar, she listens to an inner muse. Working alone in her studio she gives herself up to painting's challenges and opportunities. Whether an abandoned rose heavy with summer perfume, a golden field of daffodils, or the interplay of rooflines against a blue sky, Marie Massey records the still, magic moment.

New paintings by Marie Massey will be featured at Walden Fine Art, 125 Kit Carson Road, May 1-June 30. A Meet-the-Artist event is scheduled for May 29, from 5 to 7 pm. 575-758-4575. [www.waldenfineart.com](http://www.waldenfineart.com).