

## Finding God in Art

[Part of a service devoted to “Art as a Source for Unitarian Universalism”

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Hi , My name is Rene Schlangen and I am the owner of Rockhoppers Coffeehouse in Clinton Washington. I am also a folk artist.

Most of my days are spent doing bookwork or helping customers. Occasionally I am doing ancillary jobs like contacting and scheduling new musicians or artists, hanging and pricing new art pieces or dealing with vendors. Sometimes I even get to socialize with friends and since most of my customers have become friends... I have to admit this is one of the favorite parts of owning Rockhoppers. So, In short, I have a great life that is full and fun. But I always find myself, after a week or so of shop owners life, on the way to creating something.

As an artist, I dabble in paper mache', painting, bead work, doll painting, quilting, and rugmaking. I also work in collage work, furniture decoration, altered arts and free form crocheting.

My experience with art goes back to childhood when I spent time making clothes for my dolls. I graduated to creating an evening gown from a new sheet that my mother had just purchased and refinishing old furniture. While my family was involved in horses, I was involved in making things or learning how to make things. My father wanted me to do things with the family but he was also a professional artist and I think he understood my “calling” or “obsession”. My family .... Not so much.

I grew up Catholic. I became curious about other religions when I started dating. I never dated a Catholic boy! One day I was wondering about dad and why he never went to church. I asked him if he believed in God and he replied he did. So I asked him why he never went to church. We were out on our property on Mt. Spokane at the time and we were surrounded by large grandfather trees and a breeze was blowing and it was a gorgeous sunny day. Dad looked up at the trees, and the horses in the pasture, and said, “What do I need a chapel for? I am much more in touch with God here in his house than any house built by man...”

His answer has resonated with me for many years. ... I find God in my art. I can hear my soul's longings in my art... I find joy in my art... I find solitude and a piece of mind that is so involving and complete that for a few hours or days that it takes to do a piece I can exclude life's daily clutter.

Now not all of my art process is that calm... when I start a project, it's rather frantic. Dan calls it my manic stage. I call it my creative phase... but what I do know is that for the time it takes to dream up my creation, I get an average of 3 hours of sleep a night and for that brief frantic time of about 5 to 7 nights, “ all my circuits are connected and working”

as one of my favorite tv characters (Bernice from Designing Women) would say. It is in this phase that I dream about my piece, then sketch my piece and prep for it.

Then I do my piece.... I sit without music, people, noise or anything and I create something wonderful from nothing. I don't paint or create for anyone but me... the doorbell doesn't ring, the phone doesn't ring, my hubby is silent and downstairs (or wherever) because in truth I don't care where he or anyone else is. I am surrounded by mysteries, blending, silence and laughter, but what speaks to me is the ethereal music that comes from colors.

I find God in art... I am at home in that place of creative solitude. It revives me, it humors me, it gifts me with a sense of life. Then I can face my daily crises knowing that when things get really bad... I can always paint.