



Jane Seymour goes from Bond Girl to brush master

Article

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Jane Seymour stands alongside several of her works at the Art Trax Gallery in Mississauga this month.

RICHARD LAUTENS/TORONTO STAR



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Before Jane Seymour's art could come together, her life had to fall apart.

The 59-year-old British beauty, remembered for two radically different roles (the Bond girl Solitaire from *Live and Let Die* and the title character in *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*) sits in the Art Trax Gallery in the Port Credit area of Mississauga and ponders the circumstances that led to her bringing her paintings and sculpture to a show called *The Art of Jane Seymour*, on display until Nov. 19.

"I remember as a child I used to paint very little miniatures, and I even got my A-levels in art at school," she recalls. "But then I became an aspiring ballerina who got injured and went into acting.

"So I didn't start to paint seriously again until 20 years ago. One day I had a very rude awakening and discovered that my husband (David Flynn), whom I trusted totally, had been untrustworthy to me on too many occasions and in too many ways. In addition to all the personal hurt, he had lost all of my money."

This would be the cue for many stars to plunge into the abyss of self-destruction, but Seymour was made of stronger stuff.

"I turned to my mother, who had survived a concentration camp during World War II and she told me that if something insurmountable happened, you should reach into your heart, open it up, let it out and start again," Seymour says.

While pondering her mother's advice, Seymour went to a charity auction for a group called Childhelp, which cares for abandoned and abused young people. One of the items was a commission for a portrait.

"I knew that any minute I was not only going to be bankrupt but homeless, and still I put down every cent I had so that I could have someone paint me and my children.

"When the artist came over, he noticed that I had started doing some rough studies with my daughter's finger-paints and told me that I had talent. I laughed at first, but he guided me and reminded me of what I had once known, but then forgotten."

Seymour began to paint, "morning, noon and night. You could almost say I was addicted to it. What happened was the most marvelous thing. Instead of being devastated, I went into a Zen state. I painted the place I wanted to be and it was incredibly serene."

Looking around the gallery, Seymour has stayed true to that over the years. Her work is brightly coloured, cheerful, optimistic, full of seascapes, flowers, women and children. A world of peace and happiness.

"That helped take care of my personal demons, but I still needed to make a living," she says with a laugh. "So I called up my agent and told him I needed to work desperately and I would take anything."

"Anything" turned out to be a TV series called *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*, that was about to start shooting and had just lost its leading lady. No one had any hopes for it and Seymour admits, "I started work 24 hours after I said yes. No one even asked if I could ride a horse. It's a good thing I could."

From that unpromising beginning came a show that lasted for six seasons and was later turned into two made-for-TV movies. "It's still on the air now in reruns in 98 countries around the world," says Seymour proudly.

She believes that she was destined somehow to play Dr. Quinn, because "my father died just before all this happened and he was a doctor. He didn't believe in God, but the day before he died, I said to him, 'Dad, when you're on the other side, give me a little haunting.' And so he did."

Seymour's painting has taken her around the world and she has, in fact, been an official artist of the last three Olympics. She also designed a series of "Open Heart" paintings and sculptures to underscore the theme of last winter's Vancouver Games and relates strongly to what they represent.

"I believe that when your heart is open you receive things. I'm not aligned to any specific religion, but I believe there is a power higher than ours and I am open to whatever that may be."

She looks deeply at one of her paintings. "I almost died once. I had an allergic reaction to an antibiotic shot on a movie set and I stopped breathing. I saw the white place, the tunnel and the light, but I had no fear. I could hear them calling my name and then I spoke to whatever was at the end of the tunnel.

"If I have a choice," I said, "I'd like to get back into my body, because there's a lot more things I still want to do."

The Art of Jane Seymour is at the Art Trax Gallery until Nov. 19, 110 Lakeshore Rd. E. Port Credit. Info at www.arttrax.ca