



left, *The Lunch Ladies*, acrylic on birch panel, 20" x 30"

above, *Mary Had A Little Ham*, acrylic on birch panel, 10" x 10"

written by Lorie Lee Steiner

Start with a fine blend of talent, humour and wordplay, add a soupçon of artful nonsense and a heavy dollop of imagination, and ta da! The result is a clever combination that elevates an Angie Rees painting from merely eclectic to outright exceptional. From title to technique, each smile-inducing creation delights the eye and tickles the imagination. As you're about to learn, Angie Rees embodies the lighter side... of art and life.

Angie was born in Seattle, Washington and grew up in Edmonton, where her father was a professor at the University of Alberta. As a child, she showed a keen interest in visual art and

took classes in painting, drawing, sculpture and pottery. You name it, Angie wanted to try it. "I wasn't always creating art, but I was making 'stuff'. My poor mother had her clothing cut up if I saw a place for a piece of her outfit in my creation. Hide the scissors! We also had a crazy menagerie of neurotic dogs and entitled cats; great future fodder for an artist who loves the ridiculous and silly things in life."

Her father, Samuel Rees, was the greatest single influence in Angie's life. "I lost him about six years ago – much too soon. He exposed me to creativity at a really young age and made "the Art world" accessible by taking me to galleries, films and live theatre. Many of his colleagues were having openings in galleries or on the stage, so I grew up

Pun Intended



Honky Tonk Parade, acrylic on birch panel, 12" x 24"



above, Chicken On The Way, acrylic on birch panel, 8" x 10"



right, Bonnie and Clyde, acrylic on birch panel, 16" x 20"

understanding that being an artist was a real job."

Dad also instilled a love of wordplay in his daughter – good puns and nonsensical rhymes with the odd dirty limerick thrown in for good measure. Together, they tackled the obtuse clues in the Globe and Mail cryptic crossword puzzle with gusto. Angie recalls, "Occasionally, if he got stuck on a clue, he'd take it "under advisement" – code for a nap. Remarkably, he would wake up with his brain refreshed and know the answer. I've adopted this strategy with titles for my paintings. Every now and then a title will elude me and I, too, take it under advisement and often wake up with the perfect one."

Formal with a flourish

Advanced art training followed high school graduation – first at Grant MacEwan Community College, then at the University of Alberta, where Angie earned a BFA degree. Back then, the U of A's painting department was known for a strong 'formalist' leaning. Colour and technique over content and meaning. That training has profoundly influenced the work Angie produces today; though the subject seemingly dominates,

she isn't happy until the painting is as much about the formal elements of colour and brushwork.

To this pun-loving artist, the title is the cherry on the sundae; the finishing touch that just can't be said with a brush. Asked whether the name comes before or after painting, Angie says, "Both. And sometimes in the middle. Occasionally I have a 'Popcorn Popper' day, when rapid-fire ideas pop into my head at random, sometimes for hours at a time. I've filled many sketchbook pages on these days and I'm so happy when they occur."

She loves hearing people describe her work as "whimsical" and her heart soars when painting subjects that make her laugh. The more vibrant and patterned they turn out, the better. Angie worried for years that her work wasn't deep or serious enough, but she now realizes those qualities just aren't part of her being.

The birth of her precious boy, Jack, marked the onset of Angie's whimsical style and helped her tap into the fertile ground of imagination. "I feed it a rich and steady diet of children's storybooks and theatre, and try to indulge its every whim. This, in turn, fuels my ability to daydream. For an artist, it's very liberating."



left, Carnival High Jinks, acrylic on birch panel, 18" x 18"

above, The Painted Ladies, acrylic on birch panel, 20" x 20"

Laugh and the world laughs with you
 Living in Calgary with husband Bill (a metal sculptor aka "TinkerBill"), 14-year-old jokester son Jack, their needy dog Sampson and fat cat Violet – there is no shortage of reasons to laugh. "I spend every morning with this odd squad," Angie says, "the ideal start to the day."

Their home is filled with art collected over the years; a blend of styles and subjects that perfectly represents this eclectic household. Of note, a 20' long assemblage of quirky trinkets and treasures amassed from far and wide. At one point, a vintage Bing typewriter is attached to the wall, topped with a vibrant yellow bird that rides back and forth on the carriage. Beside it is a beaten-up brass saxophone full of red poppies. Nearby, lurks an African mask – its menacing appearance diminished by a rubber eyeball and polka-dotted party blower.

Humour resides in Angie's studio, as well. She admits, "It's a treat to listen to a recording by American humourist David Sedaris while painting, but not when the painting I'm working on requires a steady hand. Hearty laughter and fine brushwork don't go well together!" She also enjoys the mocking irreverence of cartoonist Gary Larson (creator of The Far Side). "My brain seems hardwired to notice life's absurdities. For example, I've always thought that cow udders and bagpipes bore a striking resemblance to one another. I'm currently developing a series of works about that, entitled Scotch and Sirloin."

Heading the list of artists Angie admires are Marc Chagall for his whimsy and folklore, and Paul Klee for his childlike way of interpreting the world. Another favourite is children's books illustrator Lisbeth Zwerger: "A masterful watercolorist



above, Flabracadabra, acrylic on birch panel, 8" x 8"



right, Summer Birdsong, acrylic on birch panel, 16" x 20"

whose ability to say so much with her sparse compositions has kept me fascinated for years."

Then, there is NYC artist Paul Balmer: "His cityscapes have a wonderful naïve quality that plays with your perceptions of two- and three-dimensionality. I've been working for years on a series of paintings called Itty Bitty Cities and I turn to Balmer's work regularly for inspiration. Paris sculptor Gerard Cambon also amazes me, with his ability to take a recognizable found object and present it so differently (i.e. his locomobiles series) that you forget its original purpose. Such an inventive mind!"

Icing on the cake

Having experimented with a wide variety of materials – oils, watercolours, chalk pastels – Angie far prefers acrylics for their versatility and range of applications; whether applying them thickly, or

more subtly as a thin veil. Work always begins with drawings, and much time is spent getting those "just right" before she ever picks up a brush.

"I paint exclusively in acrylics and use different textural grounds to establish interesting surfaces on cradled birch panel supports. My current favourite is GOLDEN acrylic Light Molding Paste. It is lightweight, like whipped frosting, and can be applied using almost any tool. It can be sculpted and shaped as it goes down and then scratched into at a later stage, if desired. I love the texture, and it gives me the bit of resistance I like when I paint on it."

Angie has done many commissions over the years, and likes the chance to brainstorm and collaborate with others. As long as they allow her artistic "wobble room" to make decisions that occur to her while painting. "If I'm suppressing my instincts, I don't paint well."



Moody Hues, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 30"



Notions of Grandeur, acrylic on birch panel, 10" x 20"



Button Down The Hatches, acrylic on birch panel, 6" x 12"



above, Plaid Cow Disease, acrylic on birch panel, 18" x 18"



right top, Knit Wits, acrylic on birch panel, 8" x 10"

right bottom, Plaid Is The New Black, acrylic on birch panel, 12" x 16"



Sometimes, it's a stretch...

Angie used to paint theatrical sets for Alberta Theatre Projects and Theatre Calgary, and credits the experience as wonderful training for inventing processes and new paint application techniques. It's not unusual for scenic painters to work from a 12" model and have to translate the painting detail to a stage 50 times larger.

"I learned how to paint large and fast, and how to establish a convincing illusion that would translate from a great distance ... way at the back of the house (theatre)." When her son was born, she gave up the work and the "weird hours" and started a mural company in Calgary called Eyewonder. This, and teaching Theatrical Painting at Mount Royal University kept her busy and happy until the theatre program was cut two years ago at MRU.

"I think the hardest thing about making art

full time is the financial uncertainty. It's hard to be creative when you're worried about your mortgage. Being concerned how something new might be received makes experimenting difficult, although it's really important to the artistic process to do so. My advice for those just starting to explore painting is to take as many classes and workshops as you can. I'd give this same advice to people who paint a lot. I love to take a class with someone new, particularly if it's a different technique. This forces me to stretch in a direction I might not otherwise go, and it's good to switch it up sometimes."

As panicked as she was at the loss of her teaching job, Angie channeled that energy into a change of direction and began painting for galleries full time. She explains with gratitude, "I'm so very glad that I did. I love the ability to set my own schedule. Although I've never worked



harder in my life, I'm represented by a host of wonderful galleries that give me carte blanche to paint whatever my heart desires."

The whimsical work of Angie Rees is represented by these fine galleries:

Bluerock Gallery
Black Diamond, AB
www.bluerockgallery.ca
403.933.5047

Gallery 421
Kelowna, BC
www.gallery421.ca
250.448.8888

The Avens Gallery
Canmore, AB
www.theavensgallery.com
403.678.4471

The Avenue Gallery
Victoria, BC
www.theavenuegallery.com
250.598.2184

White Rock Gallery
White Rock, BC
www.whiterockgallery.com
604.538.4452

above, Double Trouble, acrylic on birch panel, 11" x 14"
right, For A Good Time Call.....Wild Rose, acrylic on birch panel, 8" x 8"