

Nancy Tilles



P O R T F O L I O



Nancy Tilles is an award-winning artist based in Florida who works in traditional oils, but captures on canvas a timeless vibrancy and immediacy in her underwater scenes, which highlight the diversity of marine life found on reefs but also their fragile nature. X-RAY MAG caught up with the artist to find out more about her work and artistic process, gaining insight into her experience of the underwater world.

Edited by Gunild Symes
Photos courtesy of Nancy Tilles

X-RAY MAG: Tell us about your background and how you developed your artistic process.

NT: I have always identified myself as an artist. I grew up in New York and moved to Florida when my husband and I were married. In 1977, I received my Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Miami with a focus on printmaking. About 14 years ago, I began painting in oils. I love biology and had originally wanted to pursue a career in medical illustration. I suppose that is why my subject

matter is the natural world. My style has been described as "painterly realism" because brushstrokes are evident and my subject matter is represented realistically. Tropical South Florida has been my home for most of my life, and I have been greatly influenced by all the rich colors that surround me.

While working on underwater scenes, I realized that one painting seemed to continue to the next painting. I began pursuing this method deliberately, and I now have multiple series of connected paintings called diptychs and triptychs. Original paintings are sold together, as one unit. Signed and numbered giclees can also be purchased individually.

X-RAY MAG: What is your artistic mission or vision?

NT: My artistic mission is a journey and has been evolving over the years. Originally, I wanted to be a portrait artist. I wanted to create emotionally stirring representations of people. The more I painted, the more important color relationships became to me. I continued to devote myself to the individual and expanded to include sea life.

When I began painting underwater scenes, I would carefully render each creature. The personalities of the creatures were evident and influenced me to create visual stories,

Sea eEscape I and II Diptych by Nancy Tilles. Oil on canvas. Each panel is 48x36 inches (122x91.5cm)

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Fantastic Journey I, II and III Triptych, by Nancy Tilles. Oil on canvas. Each panel is 36x48 inches (91.5x122cm)



which became my diptychs and triptychs. Before completing any design, I critique my painting to make sure it is filled with vibrant light that can only be achieved with intense color relationships.

X-RAY MAG: What about the sea and its creatures inspires you?

NT: Another world exists under the sea. It is one of our most important resources. In addition to being beautiful and amazing, it provides our planet with its primary source of food. As an artist, I can help to keep the public aware of its wonder. At the very least, I can keep the conversation going.

I am so inspired by the colors. Sunlight through the water creates the most amazing

patterns of light on the reefs and the creatures who survive on them.

X-RAY MAG: Tell us about your experience in the underwater world, scuba diving or snorkeling. How and why did you start diving/snorkeling?

NT: My first experience with snorkeling was

about 18 years ago in the Florida Keys. The reefs were pristine, and the water was clear and gorgeous. I remembered how beautiful it was but did not go back until 2005 when waterproof cases became available for digital cameras. My family and I began making multiple snorkeling trips to Key Largo every year after that.

Sea eEscape III and IV Diptych, by Nancy Tilles
Oil on canvas. Left canvas 36x30 inches (91.5x76cm); right canvas 48x36 inches (122x91.5cm)



Marlin Frenzy
by Nancy Tilles
Oil on canvas
48x48 inches
(122x122cm)



Lion Fish
by Nancy Tilles
Oil on canvas
20x16 inches
(51x41cm)



*Leopard Shark
and Jellyfish*
by Nancy Tilles
Oil on canvas
20x16 inches
(51x41cm)

X-RAY MAG: What are your favorite dive sites, underwater subjects, locations?

NT: I have been fortunate enough to live only a few hours drive from the Florida Keys where some of the most beautiful snorkeling sites exist. I have also visited some of the islands in the Caribbean. That is the extent of my experience with underwater locations. However, we have hopes to visit many more places soon.

X-RAY MAG: Tell us about your paintings... how are they made? Please describe what is unique about your method or concept. How do you compile your underwater scenes? What informs your art?

NT: Inspiration for my paintings usually come from photographs that I have taken. I include all the primary and secondary colors in my palette, and I work to incorporate them in my painting so

that the colors are bright, pleasing and balanced. I am satisfied with my paintings only when the colors sing to me.

I use the Canon Powershot D10 underwater camera. I have had it several years, and it has always taken clear reliable shots.

Parrot fish, angelfish, seahorses, blue tang, yellow tail and many other colorful fish from the reefs fill my paintings. I have also painted deep sea creatures such as dolphin, marlin, mahi mahi and



sailfish. But my most loved paintings seem to be of turtles.

X-RAY MAG: How does your art relate to conservation or environmental issues facing our oceans and reefs?

NT: Since my first experience snorkeling, there has been an unfortunate decrease in the health of the Florida Key reefs. Under-

water parks, which were once bedazzling in color, have become grey with exposed rock. It seems to be a result of the rising temperature of the water, overuse of septic tanks and other reasons that are not completely understood.

There are many conservation efforts along the coast of the United States and their efforts seem to be having a positive effect on the turtle population. The Loggerhead

Marine Center is located just a few miles from me in Jupiter, Florida, and I have taken pictures of their rescue turtles from all different angles and used them as models in my paintings.

Living in South Florida, I have found that people are particularly fond of turtles, especially loggerheads. Turtles live almost 100 years. They are slow on land and fly through water. They are considered to be wise and

peaceful. With these traits they came to symbolize longevity, determination, wisdom and peace.

X-RAY MAG: Why art? Why is art important? What are the challenges and benefits of being an artist today?

NT: Art and design are everywhere. A good design eliminates confusion, brings beauty

Sea Food Chain I, II and III Triptych, by Nancy Tilles
Oil on canvas. Each panel is 36x48 inches (91.5x122cm)



and simplicity to our lives. Art inspires us in every way and encourages us to be inventive. Art can bring people to destinations and creates cultural excitement. For me, it is my own personal journey.

As a young person, I believed that I would never be able to earn a living making art, so I became a commercial artist to ensure that I would be paid. I could not imagine how I would be able to market my work. How

would people find me? When I finally began showing my work at art festivals, I realized that I was wrong. People crave art, and they are willing to pay for it.

Today, the Internet has enabled every artist to show and market their work in unique ways. Artists in one country can reach buyers in another country. It has made the world a smaller place.

X-RAY MAG: What's next? New? Upcoming?

NT: I am working on another triptych of colorful reef fish. This painting will be very decorative. I am contemplating a more abstract direction with a concentration on color.

I enjoy exhibiting my work at art festivals where I can meet people and exchange ideas. I have appeared in festivals through-

out Florida including Naples, Stuart, Jupiter, West Palm Beach, Delray Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Miami and the Florida Keys.

You can view my work at www.nancytilles.com, email me at nancy@nancytilles.com or come to South Florida and visit me in person at one of the upcoming art festivals. ■

Sail Fish Plunders Baitball I, II and III Triptych, by Nancy Tilles. Oil on canvas. Each panel is 36x48 inches (91.5x122cm)