

## Stryk . . . Continued from page 5

Georgia, and someone there recommended that I exhibit at the Fernbank Museum of Natural History. I wanted to show in Atlanta, and I like venues open to a great variety of people, so it seemed a perfect place. After visiting the museum, I wrote a proposal and sent them images. It was strangely exciting to see my paintings of floating feathers, nests, and fossils surrounding the enormous dinosaur skeletons in the museum's great hall!"

What's most important, Stryk emphasizes, is to "delve into what interests you most, craft it well, and create the most authentic work you can. That done, a life in the arts is valuable regardless of one's external success and, ironically, the work will most likely be more marketable."

She says, "I've always felt very fortunate that I paint just what I want and it appeals to enough people to make a life in the art world. When I do approach a gallery, such as those I've shown at in Chicago and Seattle, I see the work they exhibit and imagine how my work fits in with both the aesthetic approaches and credentials of their artists. Then I send them slides, my biography, artist statement and reviews."

One tip is to keep an active mailing list. Stryk says, "People are busy and a card now and then saying 'Hey, I'm out here and this is what I'm doing' is a great way to keep in touch, whether they know you well or you've just sent them slides. I enjoy getting cards from artists showing what they're up to."

### Creative Collaborations

On a regular basis, Suzanne Stryk and her husband Dan work together and explore the process of collaboration itself. The couple's creative collaborations give voice to the "otherness" of the natural world, becoming a testament to how human imagination is stimulated by place and the diversity of life forms.

In 2004, through a combination of readings and slides of artwork,

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Suzanne and Dan shared their experiences as artists-in-residence in the Pacific Northwest in a program at William King Regional Arts Center in Abingdon, VA. During this residency, Suzanne recorded observations in her sketchbooks and set out to conceive paintings directly related to fresh observations, as did Dan in his writing.

While Suzanne's sketches and paintings and Dan's poems and prose documented their exploration of a very specific ecosystem — the coastal area where the Strait of Juan de Fuca enters Puget Sound — their shared aesthetic responses conveyed more universal concepts. During the presentation, Suzanne showed her sketchbook drawings and discussed the role they play in creating finished paintings.

"Our mutual familiarity with the source of an idea allows us to understand how we've both attempted to transform it into art," Suzanne explains. "We also respond to each other's work and offer suggestions. I suppose some might call this critique, though that rather formal term hardly seems appropriate to describe our natural discussions about writing and images. Also, I enjoy illustrating the covers of Dan's books."

Occasionally Suzanne creates paintings directly inspired by a particular work of Dan's. For example, they both witnessed spotted salamanders mating in a vernal pool near their home. She did a quick sketch of one that had died. He then wrote a poem about that same salamander. She, in turn, did a painting specifically for that poem (see next column). *A!*



*Painting of a newt by Suzanne Stryk, poems by Dan Stryk.*

## We Find a Spotted Salamander, Drowned...

in violent storm the night before, tail barely poking from a mat of floating weed. Odd surprise to spy its rubbery coldness there in the vernal pool we walk to every springtime to observe new life. Rake its slightly bloated corpse to pondside with a fallen branch to probe its fate more closely. Amazed now by the jellied stream of eggs still oozing from her birth canal and flowing round her limp back legs and slate-blue tail, like a trail of stars all destined to expire *at this moment* in the dark vales of the mind.

Some omen of life's fragile surge, stopped at the moment of its birth, we're never meant to fathom in the dim pond of our sleep.

## Still Pool in the Rapids

*a sonnet by Dan Stryk*

*Cascade Trail, near  
Beaver Creek*

I wish I could remember on those flustered  
or those hostile days, the still pool in the rapids,  
low & clear in its rock bowl, sheltered by the ledge  
below the grinding spray, near where I sit on my  
damp stone. Yet there are times, after a rainless  
week, when it dries up & fills with curled brown  
leaves from the massive beech that shadows  
the foamed swirl. Sediment spread like desert  
dust on parchment of surrounding rocks  
& flattened moss, on days drear, dry, & slow.  
Yet filled again, when next I come, the pool  
waits unperturbed in its stone bowl. Waits,  
once more, like a tranquil thought  
within the churning world.

*Southwest Virginia*