

Elizabeth Indianos
Cultural Center Mural
This Blessed Plot, This Earth

Diary

The original painting by Elizabeth Indianos, was titled *The Spirit of this Place*, and was created on site 1975-1979 as an outdoor mural at the corner of Tarpon Avenue and Alternate 19. Decades later, in 2021 an updated, dynamic concept was completed by the artist within the Tarpon Springs Cultural Center (formerly, Old City Hall) and retitled *This Blessed place, this Earth (William Shakespeare- King Richard II)*.

1979 Excerpts by St. Petersburg Times Art Critic Charles Benbow

Art Critic Charles Benbow- St. Petersburg Times 1979

“Motorists whizzing by on U.S. 19 never see the spirit of this place. For them, this quiet, gulf coast community, might be just another irritation, a couple of traffic signals and shopping plazas to interrupt their rush...

“The work is both a visual reminder of its heritage for proud citizens and an access to understanding for visiting “outsiders.” ... where a 20th century town bustles around in a village established in the 19th century.”

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“Since 1975, Elizabeth Indianos, the City’s own Artist in Residence, (National Endowment of Art) researched and designed “The Spirit of this Place.” The spirit of Tarpon Springs lies in a rich, natural environment of beautiful bayous, and river and giant oaks that sheltered a series of cultures—native and pioneer. The Spirit of This Place summarizes and symbolizes the history of Humans and Nature in this place from 1500 to 1900.

“History goes counterclockwise on the wall with the old and natural. An ancient mound in the extreme upper left corner might be one of the many Tocobaga tribes matching descriptions by Spanish explorers, used for temple bases or burials, like the Safford Mound discovered in 1879 (it had precious stones mixed among pottery shards).”

“Flanked by colorfully featured fowl is a composite portrait of the hero Osceola and Chief Billy Bowlegs. Ms. Indianos says, Cowboys wrangling near the middle are borrowed from Fredrick Remington’s painting studies of Florida Cracker Boys. Near the upper right, next to an inscribed quote by poet Frank J. Dobie, are houses built at the end of the last century.”

“The apparent pictorial realism is an illusion of viewing distance and contemporary poster style simplification of form.

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“THE SIZE OF a mural,” Ms. Indianos points out, “makes the subtle blending of colors unreasonable. Pictorial necessity requires breaking down values into a light, medium and a darker shade of each color. A fourth and fifth value is used in some instances. Seen from a distance, they seem to blend.”

“So, the City of Tarpon Springs chose art, like visual short courses, to give curious visitors two chances to learn about the spirit behind this proud, peaceful place just off the beaten track.”

Elizabeth Indianos – Multidisciplinary Artist and Writer

In 1975, Elizabeth received a National Endowment for the Arts grant as the official *Artist in Residence* in the City of Tarpon Springs. Chosen to foster, enhance and define the City’s unique culture, Elizabeth developed an ongoing program of classes, gallery openings, cultural events and festivals and implemented an extensive mural painting program.

In the early 1980’s she became the first Cultural Director for the City of Tarpon Springs.

Elizabeth has award-winning projects in writing/art and public art projects, noted for *“enhancing the quality of life, exhibiting long-term vision & innovation.”* Projects include: The Thirteenth Street Pedestrian Bridge, Gainesville, Florida;

Northwest Florida State College Sundial, Niceville, Florida;
Tampa’s Southern Transportation Plaza; Charlotte, North

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Carolina's Eastland Transit Center; Tampa International Airport; The Gainesville Solar Walk; Ft. Lauderdale, Florida Libraries, and USF's Sarasota campus, outdoor mosaic, Classical Divide.

Additionally, she was one of the 5,000 design teams in the world to contribute a proposal for the World Trade Center Memorial. www.ElizabethIndianos.com

Elizabeth's plays and scripts are about artists—and what it means to be one. Stories like ***Waiting for Guacamole***, **LIBERTAIRE** and **NO KNOW NOTHING**. Each work is a focus on three personal visions, that of the lone, artist Ezmarelda in *Waiting for Guacamole*; famous figure, Auguste Bartholdi, artist of the Statue of Liberty in **LIBERTAIRE** and the creative Cave Girl who instinctively prevails in **NO KNOW NOTHING**. Elizabeth has taught Painting and Design on the Tarpon Springs Campus of St. Petersburg College since 2000.

Artist Diary- This Blessed Plot, this Earth – (excerpts)

Early March 2020

I'd sketched out the painting on the 20' by 12' wall of the Cultural Center, and was ready to begin—until COVID. Mid March, all City buildings went into lockdown (the site still is). The project postponed indefinitely until given a notice to proceed.

Mid March 2020

I entered the building one last time, unloaded all my paints and draped my 40-year painting apron over a piano stool. I deeply felt the need to preserve our stories, customs and history and knew they had significant meaning... now more than ever. Staring at the sketch on the white wall, I said a silent prayer. Would I ever return? Would we? Would I ever complete this work? Would someone else? What was to become of us, to my beautiful City and our cherished existence here?

I went home to shelter in place and to try to be “safe.” The entire world seemed to be on hold, even for “This Blessed Plot, This Earth”—that title so crucial to me, more than ever... We are going to need a lot of compassion and patience moving forward.

By the end of May, beginning of June, Cultural Director Diane Wood, and I work out a schedule. Safe distanced and masked, staff will unlock the site and give me solo entrance to the site on a weekly, agreed upon schedule.

As both writer and artist, I keep a diary of my thoughts and insights from May 27, 2020 all through summer, fall and the day of completion, March 10, 2021. Enclosed, selections of Dairy Missives.

5/27/2020 – 3/10/2021

I start my first brush stroke to the far-right painting on, “Virgil the Alligator.” He’s a big contrast to the passive alligator from 1979.

In this newer version, Nature looks out to the viewer and makes eye contact. I see you... you see me.

I’m loving life so much in here, a beautiful theatre on the other side of the painting. All So lovely, the one good thing about COVID!

In my mind, I hear the glee and squeals of children as I paint Virgil and send a picture to a friend who responds, “That Gator is the real deal!” I say, “Oh Yes! That’s it exactly.”

So much has happened and changed since painting a concrete wall at a traffic light when I had to simplify. Ironically, in the midst of covid, 40 years and near nine grandchildren later, I’m somewhat carefree and thinking of children everywhere, my City of Tarpon Springs and how much this may be enjoyed.

5/30/2020 – Virgil The Alligator is inspired by and dedicated to my friend Suzi Gablik, cultural icon and Critic. *(Born in New York City in 1934; attended Black Mountain College; studied with Robert Motherwell; Author of Has Modernism Failed, Re - Enchantment of Art, Conversations Before the End of Time, and Living the Magical Life: An Oracle Adventure)*

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Years ago, "Virgil" the alligator was Suzi's alter ego blog persona. Suzi has since lost her eyesight, and is blind. When I call her to describe Virgil, she asks, "does he have a big toothy grin?" I tell her, "Oh, Yes! He looks Just like that!"

"Virgil" as metaphor feels right to me, and is a synchronistic arrival when I paint him into being. The Actual historical Virgil, considered Rome's greatest poet (70-19 BCE) wrote The Aeneid during the Golden Age of the Roman Empire with its grandeurs and successes. His main character is duty bound, on a quest to unravel the mysteries of fate, and to act upon them, focusing on the "greater good", sometimes with an element of personal suffering. I relate as narrator.

I relate as narrator. I see Virgil and hear him, a Wise-Cracking, Smart Alec; a wry, ironic realist, and go back and forth painting him and writing his voice for a play as the story unfolds to me in 3-D form:

*Virgil enters the space thrashing and full of himself, saying:
"Same ole blood and guts, dog eat dog story isn't it? But, I got an alligator mind. I'm a dragon, in the Garden of Eden for a long, long time... Yeah, I'm a Reptilian... a regular dinosaur...and I been around thousands of years before any of you people...or any of them (points to the mural) ... and I'll probably be around another thousand- that is if you don't kill me...eat me...or turn me into luggage..."*

5/29/2020 Friday-

This painting requires more complexity and contemplation up close, and must be approached like a giant canvas, instead of a mural on an outside, concrete wall, with cars whizzing by.

I realize more and more, that each of the over 50 elements and characters must have all the thought and power of a billion-dollar Disney character for it all to work; a Bambi or a Mickey; a Minnie, or a Donald Duck, a Cinderella. Those kind of iconic, compelling persona with the power to connect up close and tell the story. My God, what have I taken on?

June 1/2020 10am-4:30pm

This is a crazy ride. Today I begin to paint a raccoon on the left side. She becomes a female energy, Miss GG Raccoon.

*I must write back and forth as I paint, again, just like in my plays, *Waiting for Guacamole* or *LIBERTAIRE*, or *No Know Nothing*, I go back and forth, between images and writing, and vice versa. I'm heading towards a new play.*

*In this world, I'm telling a story that can also be told to children- this is *Virgil the Alligator* –He writes stories- he is wise, a muse; and this is *Missy GG Raccoon*. She is sly and charming, and loving, but don't get on her bad side! – She will scratch you and then hide your socks and candy!*

Tuesday June 2nd

10:15 - 4:30

Almost finished GG Racoon, but must do touch ups before all completed and then start Mr. Marvelous Deer.

July 29th 2020

Today, almost finished Panther Boy Leonides and did some work on Mr. Marvelous Deer. Will definitely adjust the title of The Spirit of this Plot of Earth to This Blessed Place, this Earth from Shakespeare- King Richard...

August 2020

Text to a friend:

Elizabeth: OMG - Just another day here, living in a state of constant grief. At the moment, painting a painting 20' by 12' in old City Hall, now The Cultural Center.

Friend: Wowzer!! - the colors are gorgeous. I love it.

Elizabeth: Thank you. Yeah, colors a little heightened with COVID fears coursing thru my veins 24/7 - Each color choice is a scream

Friend: I just really love it so far. It's kin to break-up albums, you've been forced to break up with society, and life feels very black and white but the colors are screaming to get out.

September 2020:

I'm aiming for action in repose, that moment when all life, the good guys and the bad guys, and much of Mother Nature stops, in a suspended moment, a suspended animation, to confirm and reaffirm their existence, and ours, regardless of their position. It's as if all has stopped and said that line actor Robert De Niro says, "Are you looking at me?" or like when characters in a movie or play, stop their narrative, break that 4th wall separating audience, and talk outward to them.

October 2020

Historically, and via the thousands and thousands of choices made about characters, color and composition, all characters and elements have auditioned and earned their way into this composition, via a story teller/artist.

November 2020

The work is meant to be life-affirming while the Universe unfolds. Birds, frogs and crickets chirping, train choo chooing, waters and boats humming, humans and nature, in a state of grace moving in the direction that the Earth turns.

December 2020

Florida has a complicated history. No doubt if you picked a thread out of any one of these narratives, you will hear tales of many broken-hearted tragedies: Indians wiped out, moved on,

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discontinued; Mosquito bitten, starving explorers and pioneers sick with starvation, cholera and disease in a harsh hoy climate; the unspeakable tragedy of the Civil war and slavery. All cultures have stories of societies running out of food, supplies, and land. There are wars, illness and disease; greed, glory, occupation, and dominance; things being gathered, accumulated and then taken away.

In this painting there are no winners or losers, but rather People and Nature getting through their day; a narrative encompassing the belief, that at some point in time and through each characters' point of view, they were full on at the height of their power...

January 2021

The Painting makes me weep at times, overcome that I'm painting it, a testimony that we strive to overcome our difficult times, much as these characters, good or bad, alive or now gone, have overcome... we keep remembering them.

Here, now, and on this wall... they aren't gone, but rather continuing to exist for us all, for our friends, family and children to look at and admire, their fortitude, their desire to live and exist for one brief shining moment, and yes at one point, at the height of their existence...

I'm writing the play as I paint.

February 2021

The characters, they're spirit is still here, with houses around the bayou; Ms. Annie Dabbs upkeeping, tending and stewarding

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the Rose Cemetery, in need of care and righteousness; Epiphany divers are still diving, the water and sky are still blue and children are with us to share our stories... and this one, no doubt about love, love of it all, to be continued while times are bad or good.

2/22/21

*In painting or writing, I embrace a kind of Magical Realism. (Genre of art & literature depicting the real world as having an undercurrent of **magic** or fantasy, while grounded in the real world where fantastical elements are considered normal).*

Sure, this narrative painting could be approached as a kind of factual and scientific documentary... but why? Why would I ever be interested in that – a copy of something? I'd rather it read as a poem- referencing all kinds of things in human experience.

3/1/2021

Flying butterflies are often viewed as reaching a higher self for a deeply spiritual human. The journey of the butterfly represents transformation, a spirituality transforming the vision of a human being.

Many cultures look to this flying insect with deep reverence, a symbol for many life concepts; as a representation of soul resurrection, change, renewal, hope, endurance, and hope, change, life and courage embracing the transformation to make life better.

Thousands of monarch butterflies stop along the Gulf Coast and Florida this week as part of their migration pattern...

3/5/2021

Official Title changed to This Blessed Plot this Earth- section of William Shakespeare quote from Richard II. It completes Virgil the Alligators beginning references to Rome's greatness (as I think of my home City):

*"This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle, This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, This other Eden, demi-paradise, This fortress built by Nature for herself Against infection and the hand of war, This happy breed of men, this little world, This precious stone set in the silver sea, Which serves it in the office of a wall Or as a moat defensive to a house, Against the envy of less happier lands, -- **This blessed plot, This Earth**, this realm, this England." William Shakespeare, Richard II*

March 10, 2021

Upon Completion.

Wise Owl from the Play, This Blessed Plot, this Earth

Wise Owl:

"One might say, that all these distinctions between past present and future are an illusion, ... but... when does the concept of Home start to sneak up on you? I never realized it more than from the sky... Where Home sings me of sweet things, my life

*here has its own wings, flying over the Bayou, where I'm soaring still, Oh..."... "This royal throne of kings, this sceptered isle, This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, This other Eden, demi-paradise, This fortress built by Nature for herself Against infection and the hand of war, This happy breed of men, this little world, This precious stone set in the silver sea, Which serves it in the office of a wall Or as a moat defensive to a house, Against the envy of less happier lands,--**This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, with Gulf- an American Sea...***

(pan to Tarpon springing out the bayou, theme music, splashing, sound of waves, heat, animal noises, crickets, choo choo, swamp, birds, Indian flute- fade to dark- FINI)

4/11/2021

1/6/2022

One could say that this work and the Play, the 1st Art story of the New Year- is about hopefulness through Covid; Ghosts always find a way to have their voices heard... and we are hearing them now in the play, This Blessed Plot, This Earth - just as I heard them while painting in the Cultural Center, formerly, Old City Hall, isolated and in lock down for a year... Hearing them, and resolved to create them and bring them to life with paint and pen and story, is a testimony of faith in our survival. Now, audiences will not only see them, but hear them speak as they come to life in a multiplicity of disciplines, writing, music, dance, sound, art, set and costume design, drama.

Today, watching the Epiphany Celebrations at the Spring Bayou in Tarpon Springs, I witnessed a complete and unexpected nor anticipated synchronicity. The Dove Bearer in the Play was chosen as Dove Bearer in the actual ceremony. The Priest in the play, enacted the ceremony... The diver who retrieved the Cross, is the son of the Project Supervisor of the Building it all takes place in...I'm hopeful for 2022. It seems we may be moving in the same direction as the earth turns.