

Jennifer Shoemaker, *The Land Under the Hill*, 2020, 66"×36" acrylic on canvas.

# Reiki, Painting, and the Art of Becoming

BY JENNIFER SHOEMAKER

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IT WAS A WINDING road that led me to Reiki. It was almost as if my life were a painting, taking place in real-time with a pictorial elegance of joy, pain, and all the pieces that make up our existence. The art of painting creates something never seen before by combining swirls, drips, and lines. This sacred process takes the creator through space and time in an exhilarating experience.

I guess I never received the memo that it was time to pursue “grown-up” enterprises, as I started painting at age three and never stopped.

The pieces fell into place as I graduated high school with a diploma and a cosmetology license. I could financially support myself while delving deeper into my genuine passion for art and all things creative. I began studying art at my local community college.

A turn of the brush found me across from a counselor fifteen years into my career as a stylist and twelve years after receiving my college degree, discussing feelings of being stuck in life. Working long hours in the hair industry was more like being part of a machine than a creative endeavor. There was a void in cosmetology training about addressing the toll the profession takes on the physical body and the energetics of being a human on Earth.

No one warned me of the importance of body mechanics when you stand all day and hold weird positions while making repetitive motions. It seemed a joke that the stylist was also the counselor and confidante. Discussing these topics would have been an essential preparation for me to enter a salon at seventeen.

I felt exhausted from being a dumping ground for others’ problems, a creative individual ruled by everyone else’s ideas, and already in a body taking a beating from



Jennifer Shoemaker and Calvin Edward Ramsburg in 2021, with a Mai Vo-Dinh painting, *Untitled*, June 1996.

being physical in ways most never think about. I lost the ability to create during my free time. Frequently, I was just so mentally and physically exhausted that I lay in the fetal position in my bed, trying to get through to the next day when I wildly thought things might be better.

Looking back on this period of my life’s painting, I see I had to break down to reach a level where I had to shift my perspective to see another view. I shifted the line in the



painting that day when I decided my art was the number one thing in my life and hair was just a means to an end. At the same time, I built my portfolio and confidence in showing and sharing my work.

At the counselor's gentle prodding, I contacted a local artist who taught in my community and whom I had never met before. After seeing his work fifteen years before the fated mental break I was now experiencing, I had just filed his name away and moved on. A relationship developed from that initial email to Calvin Edward Ramsburg, leading to me becoming his protégé.

Through Ed, I became the carrier of an art lineage that began with Mai Vo-Dinh, a Vietnamese mindfulness painter who was a lifelong friend of Thich Nhat Hanh. If you look at the original printing of *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, you will see Mai's work, and his stunning illustrations line the pages of *The Hermit in the Well*, among others.

We hold Mai's life body of work in a storage unit, which we flew to Florida to save in 2017. We can now catalog and show paintings, drawings, and woodcuts, many of which were never shared. They recently came together in a book and exhibit entitled "One with the Brush."

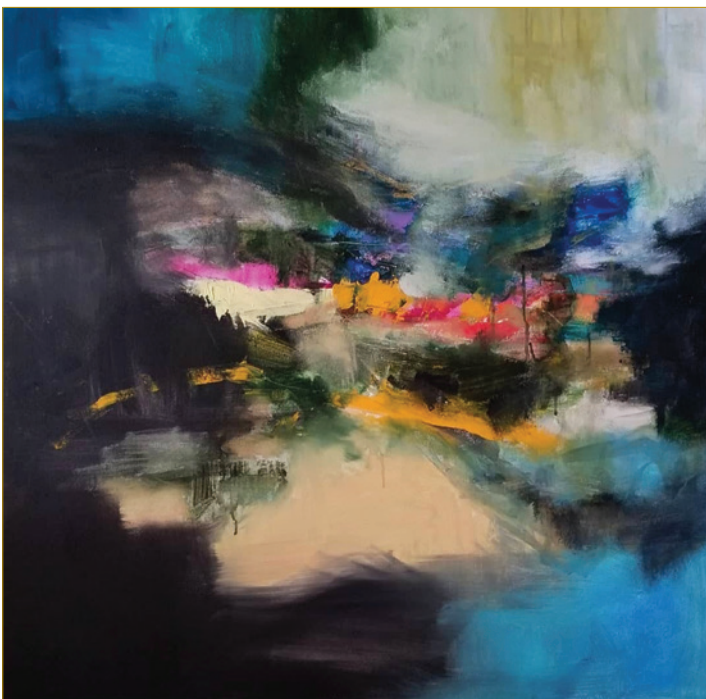
Reiki entered the story, painted almost simultaneously as Ed and the lineage. I ended up at the studio of a local practitioner who was hosting an open house. I was not a newbie to the world of healing energy and intuition, as I had grown up as a compassionate person with the gift of mediumship and empathy. Reiki helped me hone my relationship with my hair clients and helped me create beautifully charged paintings in the studio.

It was like the perfect mixing of a color I had only ever dreamed of.

When I let go of the control, I admitted I needed some help and acted in that direction. The universe worked some incredible magic, and I went on an adventure I could never have seen coming.

Ed and I collaborated and worked late nights in the studio while I learned about healing energy through Reiki. I used symbols for my protection while behind the salon

*I listen carefully to the whispers as I stare at a blank canvas. I have set the stage using Reiki to create a sacred space.*



**Top:** Jennifer Shoemaker, *No Strange Land*, 2023, 24"×24" acrylic on canvas.

**Bottom:** Jennifer Shoemaker, *All the Night-Tide*, 2019, 36"×36" acrylic on canvas.

chair at work. When an exchange was over, I learned more about boundaries and cutting energetic cords.

Something seemingly simple—using sacred symbols over my chakras and dry bathing between clients to remove any clinging residual energies—was invaluable. I grew more confident and clear. This process also served as a mindfulness practice of staying aware in busy situations.

Painting and Reiki further combined on my path as I lay symbols in my work and created a sacred space of ritual and intention in the studio. My mediumship has given me the gift of communicating with the world beyond the veil, and my creativity allows my messages and energies to bloom as art. The distance symbol is essential to me as it enables the work to radiate beautiful and uplifting energies and helps me recharge quickly.

I have journeyed from the mountains of Peru to the Omega Institute in New York, where I worked as a practitioner in 2019, to the gloriousness of Sedona and beyond. I have been creating for forty years and working as a lineage carrier and Reiki practitioner for over ten years.

Reiki was my companion on my journey with Ed and Mai and my inherited lineage. It was my companion in curating and sharing the work and its connections with the world around me. Through Reiki, I have developed a relationship with Mai through the sacred symbols and more focused intuition.

I always wished to live a life of service, and Reiki led me further down this path. However, it took me time to develop this path. I began with home studios and spaces rented and shared. I would have clients and exhibits in fits and spurts, and I struggled to find my place in the arena.

In 2019, I officially left my career behind the salon chair for a six-month seasonal position at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, NY. I helped co-manage their wellness center, and the brush swept across the painting to blur where I stood.

Eventually, I ended up being able to offer my intuitive and Reiki services to clients worldwide. This special time tried me in ways I never would have guessed. It was a new and exciting experience that attracted twenty thousand visitors in six months, including volunteers and employees who came and went as they left indelible marks on my unique creation. However, my furthest travels were ones no outside person could witness. I moved from fear to faith, breaking inward cycles seemingly controlling my life for so long.



Jennifer Shoemaker, *Towards the Light*, 2022, 72"×70" acrylic on canvas.

In 2021, during the global pandemic, Reiki, and its sacred symbols, helped me navigate the waters of a meningioma brain tumor diagnosis. During the endless cycle of MRIs, radiosurgery, and doctor visits, I spent time daily with Reiki, and my whole concentration was to heal myself



Jennifer Shoemaker, *Full Spirit Empty Spirit*, 2023, 4"×4" acrylic on cradled board.

and to comprehend what I was navigating. I was also fortunate to be surrounded by healers who supported me on my journey. I explored the use of art to communicate with the brain tumor as part of my healing process and to glean information to help others later. This brush mark took me on a surprising turn, yet one of my greatest gifts came wrapped in a package I would have returned on first inspection.

I now have self-acceptance and never apologize for my passion. I developed into owning my place in a lineage of art and stopped questioning if I was worthy of the honor. I also realized that the space I had longed to be of service with Reiki was in myself, not outside. I grew exponentially and more deeply explored the nature of distance Reiki.

I watch as the painting of my life continues. I have many ancestors behind me who are a part of my unique journey through this space we know as life. I met many on the somewhat lonely path of a health crisis.

I listen carefully to the whispers as I stare at a blank canvas. I have set the stage using Reiki to create a sacred space. I follow my spirit as it leads me on with color, shape, runs, drips, control, and looseness in a dance with the Divine that always precisely delivers what is needed. It always

leads the way, and I listen as I paint, chant, dance—whatever it calls me to do.

Between Reiki, the innate gifts I have worked to own, my lineage tree of ancestors and artists, and the grounding process of creating my art, I meet life's sweeping brushstrokes with less anxiety and fear and more with curiosity and gratitude for spirit. As my teachers would say, "Having the tools in the toolbox sets you up, whether or not you need them."

In life and art, painting has taught me it is less about the end product and more about who we become. ■



*Jennifer is a Holy Fire® III Karuna Reiki® Master, artist, and intuitive. She combines beauty with healing and mindfulness in virtual color analysis reports for clients worldwide. Jennifer is currently writing, showing her art while creating healing card decks, and developing workshops for various purposes, but in particular, to help beauty professionals navigate the industry in balanced, healthy ways. Her home base is in Maryland. You may contact Jennifer at [jen@themntnpath.com](mailto:jen@themntnpath.com) and visit her website, [www.themntnpath.com](http://www.themntnpath.com). Photo by Luigi Crespo Photography.*