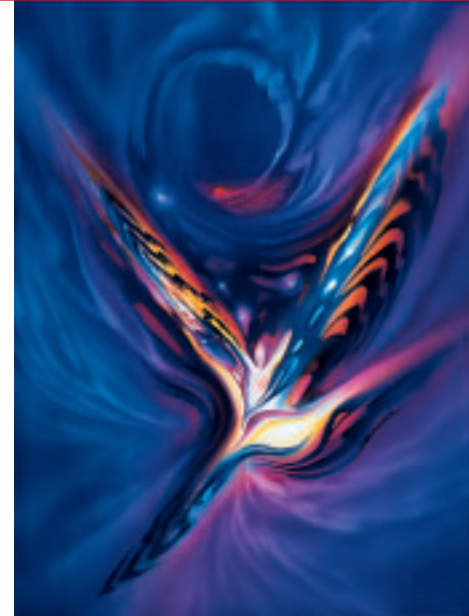




The First Explorers ©2002 George Sumner



Where Pearls Are Born © 2003 George Sumner

GEORGE SUMNER: FROM WHALES TO WINE

... an artist's 42-year Journey to help protect our fragile planet

You cannot encounter artist George Sumner or his works without coming away refocused on nature's gifts and our need to protect them. This he does with a very carefully nurtured conscientious sense of his art and his place in the world. He always has nurtured a personal style, rich in suggestions of inner radiance. Calling himself an environmental impressionist, he has, in about forty years, produced a body of work that places him now in the forefront of ecological art – a genre he helped to create.

Only Northern California fine red wines could “haul out” environmental artist George Sumner from the ocean depths. George and his loving wife Donnalei

have joined a new crusade for humanity. Their friend Heidi Kuhn recruited the artist/activist couple to join *Roots of Peace*, a global project involved in de-activating land mines. The following interview by California Tour and Travel (CaIT&T) with artist George Sumner (GS) tells the story...

CaIT&T: George, you are recognized worldwide for your environmental paintings of whales and dolphins. What led you to paint whales?

GS: Although my professional art career started ten years earlier painting large colorful abstracts, I was very active from a young age as an environmental activist. In 1972, I joined a fledgling group dedicated to protecting our fragile ecosystem. This group became Greenpeace. A year

earlier I was active with a group from Northern California that founded the “Mendocino Whale Wars” to protest whaling off the California coast.

The simple fact that these peaceful, intelligent giants that feed off of krill (tiny shrimp-like animals) were being mercilessly slaughtered for shoe polish, pet food and fertilizer sickened me to a state of anger which in turn led me to become a pioneering and life-long crusader of the “Save the Whales” movement.

My paintings became my spokesperson for my passion to protect these great beings. 35 years later my loyalty to this cause has remained constant. I vowed never to stop painting whales until they stop slaughtering them. Sadly, this terrible

practice continues as we speak.

CaIT&T: Do you feel your passion to save the whales has had any productive results?

GS: Indirectly, with the help of thousands of other “compassionate defenders” of wildlife, educating the public to man’s destructive ways has had a positive effect, especially with our youth. The fact that Americans have gained a whole new empathy to protect the great whales gives me great solace.

By far my greatest accomplishment in this crusade to protect the health of our ocean planet and our friends of the sea was to stir the conscience of my own son Sean at a young age to love and respect our fragile ecosystem as I do. Born on my birthday, no

father could be more proud of his son. At 33, Sean attained his Ph.D. in marine biology from UCLA.

CaIT&T: What other subject matters encompass your passion while painting?

GS: Nature in general. From bioluminescence in our deep oceans, fjords, volcanic lava streams, dragonflies, waterfalls, deep space – you name it – I thoroughly enjoy interpreting nature in my abstract style of painting, hoping to call attention to its grandeur and reminding the public of how fragile our beautiful ecosystem is, and the need to constantly protect it!

CaIT&T: As a professional artist for 42 years, what is the highest honor you feel you have attained?

GS: I have always been deeply

grateful for the opportunity to be able to make a living in a profession I continue to have enormous passion for. I enjoy painting as much or more now as I have since the day I began my career. Having created and sold over 3,000 oil paintings, sold out 32 limited editions, published 72 series of fine art posters (that's over 150,000 posters) and countless note cards and postcards is not bad by any artist's standards.

My highest honor to date is still winning a competition (of over 1200 fantastic artists) for the official painting permanently installed into the Statue of Liberty for its 100th year celebration – July 4, 1986.

I have been blessed and greatly humbled by many fine honors given to

me during my lifelong career. I have particularly fond memories of hugging President Gorbachev at Stanford University moments before he delivered his End of the Cold War speech, and creating the official paintings for the 50th anniversaries for both the United Nations and Golden Gate Bridge.

CaIT&T: How did the theme of this article develop? – “From Whales to Wine”?

GS: After three decades of my art dedicated toward the sanctity of the sea, I feel the importance to gently remind the general public I do paint many other subject matters including abstracts. As actors resist being type casted for successful roles in movies, artists also need total freedom to exercise their creative search for new expressive imagery.

After spending much of my life trekking across the globe promoting environmental protection, I have recently decided to slow down and kind of smell the roses close to home.

Much of my success for the last 15 years is a direct result of my loving and devoted partner in marriage as well as our business, my wife Donnalei. Together we have really been enjoying quiet time exploring the colorful and peaceful back roads of our gorgeous wine country. Besides thoroughly enjoying fine red wines, I have started painting a new series of images reflecting the joy and color of these radiant vineyards in autumn.

Our new interest in the wine country has not translated into a de-emphasis of our activism. *Roots of Peace* has become our latest project. I am currently creating a series of wine labels to donate to both local and international wineries who support this great humanitarian cause.

Our recent efforts to support *Roots of Peace* have already had exciting results. The largest organic winery in Canada, Summer Hill Estate Winery is the first winery to use a new label in a series I am designing specifically for the support of *Roots of Peace*.

Equally exciting are our new projects working with my old friend Pat Kuleto and Kuleto Winery and Far Niente Wineries, with Jeremy Nickel (son of owner Gil Nickel) to help kick start our new adventures in the wine country. Donnalei and I have quietly taken on this project as another way to support good things for our planet. There you have it! – From Whales to Wine.

CaIT&T: Do you have a preferred audience for your art works?

GS: In the mid-eighties my work was being shown in 42 art galleries, and 435 print stores nationwide.

The financial rewards and exposure for my work as a result of those activities did not match my expectations nor satisfy my soul. Money and celebrity have never been my



George and Donnalei Sumner with San Francisco restaurateur, Pat Kuleto

Roots of Peace – from Mines to Vines

The San Francisco Bay Area Group, *Roots of Peace*, is a humanitarian non-profit organization dedicated to the eradication of landmines worldwide by returning demined land to productive agricultural use. Their innovative “Mines to Vines” initiative has successfully replaced the scourge of landmines with the nectar of grapes allowing innocent farmers to return to their fields.

Roots of Peace began in September 1997 following the death of the late Princess Diana who shed light on the dark issue of landmines – where over 50 million landmines are silently poised beneath the soil in over 50 countries. Founder, Heidi Kuhn, earned the support of California vintners Robert Mondavi, Miljenko Grgich, Gina Gallo, Judy Jordan, Dennis Cakebread and over 400 wineries through the support of the California Wine Institute. “History has shown that when we nurture the land, we also nurture the human spirit,” says world renown vintner Robert Mondavi.

Through the generous support of the California wine industry, *Roots of Peace* has successfully raised funds to demine five Croatian cities. Croatian born vintner, Miljenko Grgich, who put the California wine industry on the map by winning the Paris Tasting in 1976, has been a leading supporter of the Mines to Vines initiative.

Napa Valley vintners Ron and Diane Miller, owners of Silverado Vineyards, have taken a leadership role in demining the vineyards of Afghanistan. Through the efforts of this generous winery, over 300 Afghan deminers began their courageous work on May 1, 2003, restoring an estimated 10 million landmines in Afghanistan with bountiful vineyards – a symbol of life! Yet, grapes and raisins were a primary source of export to India and Pakistan before the planting of landmines. On June 1, 2003, Cambodian deminers were employed by *Roots of Peace* through a generous donation provided by California based ChevronTexaco Corporation.

Today this meeting goes full circle, as George and Donnalei Sumner join *Roots of Peace* by creating an international series of designer wine bottle labels benefiting the Mines to Vines initiative. Already, Canadian and California vintners are actively participating in the program where proceeds of each bottle sold will benefit demining.

The artistic representation of a grapevine transcends politics and religion, and evokes the artistic beauty of the earth. Whether the juicy nectar of grapes, raisins, or a fine bottle of wine, the image of bountiful vineyards inspires hope for humanity,” says George Sumner. “I hope that my paintings will inspire global citizens to celebrate the seeds we have in common rather than those which separate us.”

Both Kuhn and Sumner look forward to a Harvest of Hope in 2003 where the world will raise their glasses in a global toast to peace... and share your dreams!

For further information, please see www.rootsofpeace.org or www.sumner-studios.com



A River Runs Through It ©2002 George Sumner

goal. During this period I went through a prolonged divorce and collapsed my two corporations as well as my associations with the aforementioned.

I have always considered myself a street artist – always preferring to meet the public and their honest reactions to my work face-to-face. Far too many art galleries tend to intimidate the public with pseudo intellectual babble.

To me art is a bridge to the human soul. It is basically a very simple human emotion. Your honest basic instinct tells you all you need to know. I truly have been privileged to have an amazing cross-section of those who enjoy my work. Many great and honored celebrities collect my work. But, I must admit to you right now my joy and love in sharing my art is with young children. That’s what keeps me painting!! What better audience could you ask for?

CaIT&T: What art exhibits do you plan for your immediate future?

GS: For nearly 40 years I have participated in outdoor art festivals in order to reach the public – discussing my work and any environmental information I can pass on, especially to our youth.

Donnalei has added a great calmness to my previous hectic lifestyle. We now choose only a few fine outdoor art festivals combined with three home studio exhibits each year. These shows and a constant backlog of commissions from a wonderful group of loyal patrons keeps our schedule full.

My favorite outdoor art festival just so happens to be one of the finest in the country. The Sausalito Art Festival also happens to be located only



Sweet Liberty © George Sumner • Statue of Liberty Centennial

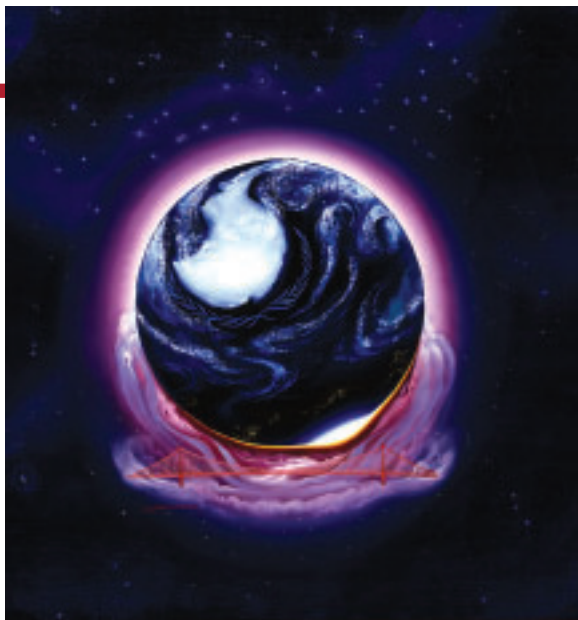


GIFT OF GIGANTIC PROPORTIONS

George and Donnalei Sumner have continued their public contributions as Bay Area artists - a team effort to generate their message of awareness about the environment and art. The Whale Bus was first painted by George Sumner, who donated over 100 hours of his time in 1991. It has been used daily as a regular transit bus and has traveled over 650,000 miles in twelve years bringing over 1,000,000 smiles. It still remains the pride and joy of Golden Gate Transit's fleet.

Widely known throughout the Bay Area on its various routes, the ever effervescent Donnalei delivers environmental knowledge to thousands of elementary school children. Donnalei visits many Bay Area schools with the Whale Bus several days during the spring and autumn months.

Together, George and Donnalei's gifts are given with a selfless gratitude, providing symbols of today's culture and communication. The outlook for natural survival of marine mammals and fragile lifeforms are just beginning to be understood. Students studying the ocean's vast, uncharted territories are challenged to become the leaders in this remarkable science. This is a realization that has created a vital role for this bus to link the welfare of ocean neighbors to our own lives and civilizations.



Renewal: UN 50th Anniversary Commemorative Painting ©2003 George Sumner

several blocks from our Sausalito art studio.

I helped pioneer this art festival through thick and thin, and I still consider it a privilege and a joy to exhibit in it. This will be my 33rd consecutive year exhibiting and playing at this great art event!!

Remember – bring your kids and/or your neighbor's kids to the Sausalito Art Festival, Labor Day Weekend. That's where art begins!!

CaIT&T: When did you feel you first became a success, and how do you define success?

GS: I feel anyone who has a true passion and love for the life work they choose, and can support themselves in that endeavor, has truly reached success. In my opinion, many people in this country make huge amounts of money and spend little time with family. They are usually angry and short-tempered thinking they have

achieved success. This is the opposite of success.

Usually when I am asked what I think success means, I grin and say, 'When you're driving the opposite way of rush-hour traffic, you have reached success!!'

A more soulful response is... 'Do something positive for the society you live in during the short time we reside on this beautiful, lovely planet!'

At our most recent outdoor art festival a young child, about two years old, broke away from her mother in a crowd of art admirers and made a beeline across the lawn straight for one of my large oil paintings of a great whale. The little girl stopped short of crashing into the painting with her mother in hot pursuit, only to express a joyful cheer, pucker up her lips and plant a giant kiss on the whale's cheek.

That's what it's all about! By my way of thinking – *now that's true success!*