



Gail Foster

November 30, 1955 - October 25, 2024

Gail Foster Swanston

“Grace Under Fire” is the title of the current exhibition of Gail Foster’s artwork at StudioSwan in Chattahoochee Hills. The title aptly describes Gail’s well-known ability to keep smiling, painting and drawing, and caring for others, while in the midst of her own debilitating health challenges.

Gail Leah Foster (Swanston) was born on November 30, 1955 in Providence, Rhode Island to Judith (Sturtevant) Foster and Edward Foster, growing-up in nearby Rumford. Gail died unexpectedly at her home in Chattahoochee Hills in the arms of her beloved husband, Thomas Swanston, on October 25, 2024. Gail was sixty-eight years old.

Gail was predeceased by her parents and by her brother Peter, her mother and father-in-law, Barbara Leigh “Bobbie” Swanston and Thomas Robinson Swanston Sr. and her niece Kristen Foster. Her close friend of 46 years, Joseph Petrick of Hornell, New York, died only two days before her. She is survived by her husband Tom, her brother Ted and niece Kim Foster of Boston Massachusetts, her sister-in-law Leigh Anne Rothman (Swanston) of Charleston, brother-in-law William “Bill” Swanston of Atlanta, Georgia, and David Swanston of Portland, Oregon.

Gail was a life-long visual artist, graduating Summa Cum Laude in 1978 from the Maryland Institute College of Art with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. She then matriculated with honors in 1980 from the first Master of Fine Arts degree program offered by Parsons School of Design/The New School in New York City, where she met Tom, beginning a lifetime collaboration in art and love. Over the past 40 years, Gail exhibited in galleries and museums in Atlanta, Charlotte, Houston, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York and Santa Fe. From large canvases to small works on paper, her creativity was unbounded; she worked every day in her studio ~ it was where she found freedom from the earthly ties that bind. Earlier this year, collaborating with the writer & friend Dan Reilly, Gail published a book of sepia paintings and poetry and has another book of charcoal drawings coming out soon.

Gail was a pleasure to be with, always genuinely interested in everyone she met, generous in care and concern, giving freely her praise and encouragement to others. Last year, while lying for months in a rehab facility with fractured vertebrae, unable to move, Gail created hundreds of paintings and drawings on paper. Her sense of optimism and concern for others never dissipated. She gave many of these works to the staff who cared for her. Of all the homes, offices and collections throughout the U.S. and other countries where Gail's artwork can be found, she felt the most satisfaction and fulfillment from her painting which hangs in the chapel at Shepard Center in Atlanta.

Her time at Shepard gave Gail a second life and lasting friendships. She was very happy to give something back.

The Craig Neilson Foundation enabled Gail to attend The Ragdale Residency Program north of Chicago and The Playa at Summer Lake Arts and Science Residency in the high desert of southeastern Oregon. Both of these allowed Gail to exercise her interest in travel and her great appreciation of the land, altering her perception of landscape to emphasize the human figure between

sky and earth.

A life-long dog lover, Gail leaves behind Bruno and Stevie, often prominent in her drawings, her heartfelt companions.

To know Gail was to feel her love which she radiated despite a spinal cord injury and survival of pituitary cancer while also living with an autoimmune disease and MS. Her recent small pieces on paper, shrouded figures and diminutive dreamscapes of epic narrative, are a myth-making, her very own existentialism. Paintings wildly joyous, colorful and mysterious, are left fluttering behind her like the fall leaves she enjoyed so much. As well, her sepias, a medium of more somber hues, do not depict anxiety and despair but are more suggestive of spirit in the human form, in the world, an energy of duration and flow which is palpable, especially when the works are viewed together. No destination, no truth. A meaning amorphous with distinct, ever-present wonder, an instinctive awe and so often a floating, a release from gravity. "Are we falling or are we rising?" as Gail said. "Sometimes a figure in a painting will begin as a falling one and turn into a rising figure by the end of the process." Her images pause, contemplate, without regard for the coming defeat of us all, though there is yearning. Gail's art is a passion to behold. Tom enjoyed spending time with Gail more than with any other person. They loved each other for 46 years, and celebrated their 41st wedding anniversary last summer. There will be a celebration of Gail's beautiful life at a future date to be announced.