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from the  
Heart**

ISSUE 3

“My process is about what I’m feeling most, what I respond to, and it isn’t always about my own story, I care about what is going on in the world.”

—Mindy Weisel  
Artist

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## Mindy Weisel: Following Her Heart with Art

by Linda Egenes

For Mindy Weisel, art is about feelings. Take the time she was driving to New York City one winter’s day in 1995 and heard a radio report of the devastating Kobe earthquake in Japan. That day she started an immense painting and collage called “The Day the World Ripped Open”

because, as she says, “I’m sure for those people it did.”

“Basically after I learned drawing and painting through all the rigorous study, I understood that you could learn all the technique in the world, but if you don’t feel it, no one else will feel it either.”

An oil painter who in recent years has turned to glass as a medium, Weisel has shown her work in solo shows in prestigious galleries and is the recipient of numerous awards. Her art appears in the Hirshhorn Museum, the National Museum of American Art, the Israel Museum, the U.S. Embassy, the Baltimore Museum of Art, and the Archives of American Artists at the Smithsonian Institution.

“My process is about what I’m feeling most, what I respond to, and it isn’t always about my own story,” she says. “I care about what is going on in the world.”

For someone whose art is so personal and expressive, it’s hard to imagine that Weisel has ever struggled to find her artistic voice. Yet she identifies this to be her main challenge as an

artist.



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## Drawing from Personal Experience

"I have an unusual background," Mindy says. "I was born in 1947 in Bergen-Belsen, Germany, in a displaced persons camp, one of the first children born to Holocaust survivors after the war. Growing up as the only daughter of Holocaust survivors, I don't think I had a clue what it meant to live my own life."

She did know she liked her art and literature classes in high school, and decided to major in art in college. But finding her place as an artist was daunting.

"It was during the time when my kind of art, which is a very emotional, expressive, abstract expressionist painting, was not taught," she says. "I really struggled with my professors, but despite a lot of crying and frustration, I stuck with it."

Weisel continued her graduate studies at American University, and with the help of mentors she found there, she established her own studio by age 27 and launched her first solo painting show.

But it wasn't until she dug deep into her own personal experiences that she found her own voice and gained recognition in the art world.

"Basically after I learned drawing and painting through all the rigorous study, I understood that you could learn all the technique in the world, but if you don't feel it, no one else will feel it either."

In 1978 Weisel started a series using her father's number at Auschwitz, which was tattooed on his arm. Weisel says, "The paintings started out colorful, but I wrote his number all over them and they became blackened out, dealing not only with the destruction of beauty, but to my surprise there was light coming through the paintings—so it became the survival of beauty."

Created long before there was a Holocaust museum, before *Schindler's List*, Weisel's paintings of 1978 were well received by art critics and laypersons alike and were shown in a traveling exhibition in museums around the country.

Weisel says that this experience of growing awareness from her TM practice carries over into the process of making her art. "I'm being more present in the creative process as well," she says. "Work doesn't have to be so hard. Work can come from a place of flowing, of openness, of responsiveness, of hearing, of listening. You don't have to fight so hard to get to that work."

She's also more at peace. "I was very much a Holocaust survivor's daughter, running to stay ahead of everything, to fill up the loss," she says. "And that running had made me very, very sick. Since meditating I can just be. I take better care of myself, I take the time to meditate, and I love the experience."

"Art is the skillful expression of life. The artist, constantly utilizing his creative impulses, continues to draw from the reservoir

## Working in the Moment

Yet as her art evolved, Weisel says she continued to struggle emotionally with each piece to discover what she wanted to say.

She quotes the German artist, Hans Hoffman, and the Jewish philosopher, Abraham Joshua Heschel, who both said that an artist should not have a memory.

Weisel explains, "What that means is that each time you approach your work it should be as if for the first time. So you're not thinking, 'How did I make this painting before?' or 'What color did I use?' as that takes away from the immediate experience of making the art. For me, creating art is not premeditated at all. It's literally surrounding myself with my materials and going right into it."

"I really struggled a lot to find an honest voice to say what I want to say," says Mindy. "I noticed that after I started the Transcendental Meditation technique, my TM practice has really helped me be in the moment." Weisel continues, "It seems to me that in the last eight years, since I started meditating, that's what's changed. If the art is not coming, I don't even struggle with it. I simply put myself in a place where it's possible to make art."

Another dramatic shift for Weisel is that she is now using brilliant-colored glass as a medium. "This is amazing to me, because I never knew anything about glass," she says. "I'm doing things creatively that I never ever would have imagined. I walked into this glass studio, I recognized something, I was ready to learn, and I didn't doubt it. I can attribute this switch in materials to meditating, because it kept me open enough to try it and enough in the present to make it."

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of creativity present in his own being. This is how his consciousness, bathing in the fresh springs of creativity, rises to the prodigious brilliance of natural creation. Exposed to the beautiful process of unfoldment, an artist, when he opens his awareness to the fullness of pure creative intelligence within, draws together the strokes of inspiration and ultimate achievement and enjoys them in the oneness of freedom.”

—Maharishi, 1975

Weisel took classes at Pilchuck Glass School in Seattle to learn her new medium, and just a year and a half later, her vibrant, colorful works appeared in a solo exhibition, “Words on a Journey of Glass,” at Katzen Art Museum, American University.

Describing her experience in meditation as a deep, profound, meaningful rest that is beautiful, easy, and simple, she says, “You are in a state of being, of being in the moment, and somehow that lasts—it accumulates.”

Weisel says that this experience of awareness carries over into the process of making her art. “I’m being more present in the creative process as well,” she says. “Work doesn’t have to be so hard. Work can come from a place of flowing, of openness, of responsiveness, of hearing, of listening. You don’t have to fight so hard to get to that work.”

Somehow Weisel finds time to express herself in writing as well. The author of five books, she is currently working on her memoir, *Making Marks*, in which she writes about making marks of longing, of loss, of survival, of beauty.

“I think that’s what my work is about. It’s very emotional, and I’m always thrilled that somebody feels something when they look at it. You can change your mind about things but you can’t change your feelings about things. You really have to understand them. They won’t go away until you understand them.”

#### RELATED LINKS

- Mindy’s website ►
- Video: Mindy talks about TM ►
- Video: Mindy Weisel talks about the influence of being a Holocaust survivor in her life and in her art ►
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#### Comments (2)

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written by a guest

Mindy’s experience as an artist practicing TM is extremely helpful. I was delighted that TM augments her art, because I was always afraid that being too calm, too centered (if that’s possible) would quench the urge to create good art. Mindy’s experience posits the contrary. Thanks for the insight.

...

written by a guest

Mindy, many years ago I completed a master thesis on Van Gogh, Kandinsky and creative intelligence. There is a book called Concerning the Spiritual in Art by Kandinsky on color and form you will find beautiful.

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