

# A 'Symbol of Freedom'



*This Artist and Gallery Owner Thrives in Arizona After a Remarkable Journey to the United States*

**W**hen Andrea de Kerpely-Zak spoke over the phone to a reporter, Arizona's perfect blue sky was hidden behind

a storm of grey.

"I'm more for light and happiness," de Kerpely-Zak says. "But the storm also has a beauty, it's a different color, but it's beautiful. The clouds are rolling, which you never see here."

The Arizona-based artist is a lover of light. Her artwork is the product of the light and emotion of a particular moment of the day. She paints fast and occasionally works on two or three paintings at one time, sometimes only using one brush. Most of her works are done in acrylics, but she uses a lot of water in them for effect, which results in a watercolor appearance. Because "nothing is finished in life," this well-traveled artist doesn't fill in every spot on the canvas.



Andrea Kerpely-Zak, left, and her daughter Andrea Zakrzewski

## FINDING ART AMID TRAVELS

Born in Hungary, de Kerpely-Zak, 67, had art in her life from an early age. From 6 years old she was tutored in art, music and sports. Her mother, a professor, would always send her to extracurricular art classes where she experimented in drawing, perspective and watercolor. Even then, watercolor was her favorite medium. She was taught to close her eyes and not pay attention to what was in front of her but to paint what remained in her mind.

In 1956, she moved across the Atlantic Ocean to Montreal, Canada. She continued visiting exhibitions, but sometimes long periods of time would go by when de

Kerpely-Zak did not paint.

"My husband always said, 'You need to get back to painting,'" she says.

They lived in Montreal for 10 years before moving to Arizona only for a year before her husband was transferred to Hawaii. But after two years on the island, when her husband gave her the choice on where to live, de Kerpely-Zak chose Arizona. She knew they could always return to Hawaii, but the colors and light of Arizona were too attractive for de Kerpely-Zak to stay away.

The floral paintings that are characteristic of the artist today came about in 1978 when de Kerpely-Zak returned from a visit

**BY VALERIA TURTURRO • ABN CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

to Hungary. While she waited for a train along Hungary's border, the field of flowers surrounding her inspired this artist. "This is freedom," she thought.

"When you're growing up you don't know what it's like not to be free," she says.

When de Kerpely-Zak returned to Hungary that year she returned to a country still under restrictions and part of the Eastern bloc. This had a strong effect on her. In the first painting she did when she came back from Hungary she used light and shadows as symbolic divisions of East and West.

### MAKING ROOTS IN ARIZONA

When de Kerpely-Zak's husband was involved in a serious car accident and could not work full-time for a while, she thought it was time for her to do something with her work. One of the first places she thought to sell her floral paintings was a gallery in the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport; they even asked her to come work part-time in addition to showing her work. During an airport reconstruction, the gallery was transferred to Scottsdale, Ariz., where de Kerpely-Zak continued to work and show her art, in addition to other galleries.

Her daughter, Andrea Zakrzewski, was studying media at Arizona State University at this time. When she graduated, she suggested that her mother open a gallery. de Kerpely-Zak was not convinced to do it alone, so her daughter joined her in opening Gallery Andrea six years ago.

"What I've enjoyed most about having a gallery with my mom is that I am having a big impact on preserving the legacy of her art and touching others lives through the power of her art," Zakrzewski says. "We get a long very well and think alike



"Healing Flow," acrylic, 40 x 60 inches

in many ways. I'm a huge fan of her art so it makes promoting very easy."

Zakrzewski, who has her own paintings in the gallery, handles more of the public interaction and media aspect of the gallery. In addition to their artwork, nearly 20 artists are showcased in the gallery, many of which share the same lightness in their paintings that de Kerpely-Zak cares so much about.

"I'm always looking for ways to make our business more successful," Zakrzewski explains. "I'd like to look into what I can do on the Internet to promote our gallery nationally and internationally and possibly tap into Hungarian and Polish art as new acquisitions. I also would like to write a book about my mom's story and art be-

cause I think the symbol of freedom that her art represents and the healing quality are magical."

Right now, de Kerpely-Zak works mostly on what she calls lyrical compositions, which are always focusing on the effect of the light, and she says she's working toward contemporary compositions. Sometimes she uses desert plants and Sedona, Ariz., landscapes, but flowers are her main subject matter.

Many of de Kerpely-Zak's collectors span the globe from Sweden and Italy to Turkey and Japan.

"They're such cheerful works," says Robert Hamilton, Ph.D., a collector of de Kerpely-Zak in Arizona. "I like the simplicity and that they're so straightforward,

**“If you care about your art you don’t care if it’s plus or minus in sales,” she says. “If you have a great skill, it’s not anything you’d want to give up.”**

**— Andrea de Kerpely-Zak**



“Love Connection,” acrylic, 48 x 48 inches

organic, airy and fresh.”

Hamilton is a concert pianist and professor of music at Arizona State University. He and his wife have bought several of de Kerpely-Zak’s works. The Hamiltons have given some as gifts to immediate family but have the rest hanging throughout their house. Hamilton says that the pieces displayed by his piano are inspirational while he plays.

One of Hamilton’s favorite de Kerpely-Zak works that he has is a copy of a painting originally commissioned for Pope John Paul II. It is a large poppy towering over smaller flowers symbolizing the pope and his people. The original is one of two de Kerpely-Zak works hanging in the Vatican.

**‘EVERYTHING IS ABOUT LIGHT’**

As both an artist and gallery owner, de Kerpely-Zak sees the ups and downs of the art market, but it doesn’t faze her.

“If you care about your art you don’t care if it’s plus or minus in sales,” she says. “If you have a great skill, it’s not anything you’d want to give up.”

She enjoys knowing that her works make people feel happy and serene. Perhaps that’s why they are wonderful additions to environments such as hospitals, where serenity is needed most. de Kerpely-Zak has had work hanging in the Mayo Clinic for the past three years in addition to other hospitals.

“Everybody wants to have something happy, something to lighten up their whole view,” she says.

“Everything is about light,” she says. She usually paints from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m when the light is best. Her inspiration comes from artists like van Gogh and Monet, music by Mozart and Chopin, colors that she collects and nature. Even



“Flowers Among Flowers,” acrylic, 48 x 36 inches

her two other daughters are named after flowers, Gardenia and Konvalia.

“Everything in nature rejuvenates you and gives you a better perspective,” de Kerpely-Zak says.

As de Kerpely-Zak finishes talking, the storm outside Gallery Andrea subsides. “Now it’s sunny and nice out again,” she says. That’s why Arizona fits her: it’s never too long before the light is good again.

*Valeria Turturro is a magazine journalist with a love for the arts. She is no artist herself but enjoys learning and sharing stories about artists, gallery owners and framers. Years down the road, she hopes to open her own gallery. ABN*



“Surrounded by Love,” acrylic, 24 x 48 inches