

## The WIP Project: What Is Painting? featuring Karen Perl

The WIP Project: What Is Painting? We thought it would be interesting to ask painters this simple yet complex question. This query comes with no ground rules—it's up to each individual artist to find their own approach and direction.

This project will be an ongoing exploration ... let's see where it takes us.

### What Is Painting?

by Karen Perl

Painting is a gift.

At around the age of 12 I inherited a box of paints and some brushes. I knew absolutely nothing about oil paints, but I had an image in my head. It was of a dense green forest. A mysterious figure walked down a path under a canopy of trees. I could feel the presence of something powerful that I could not describe in words.

I like to think that it was this combination of the tangible and the intangible that first ignited my desire to paint. When I was handed the paint box, did I already have the image of the woods in my mind, or did it come as a result of now having paint and brushes – the tools – in my hands?

That first painting was not very well executed. After it was done, I let the paint dry on the brushes and they all had to be thrown away. But the intensity of the vision and the impulse to paint it was as perfect as it has ever been over the past years.

Painting has never been merely visually descriptive for me. Even if I am looking at a building and trying to paint it with the correct perspective and lighting, I'm searching for something more.

I've never again tried to paint the mysterious vision in the forest. But sometimes I will be mixing a color on the palette, looking for just the right blue. I will be deciding which brush to use to paint the sky. Suddenly my cat will leap up onto a table near me, getting my attention and distracting me from my work. I will feel a ghostly presence in the room. When I turn back to look at the canvas it will seem different. Now, the painting can begin.



**Karen Perl,  
Guide Dog,  
oil on wood,  
16" by 8"**

#### About

*Karen Perl began her studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago while still in grade school. After several years in various colleges studying everything from physics to psychology, she finally returned to the Art Institute, where she earned a degree in drawing and painting. An exchange program took her to Dublin, Ireland, for a year. There, inspired by a foggy, dreamy landscape and under a spell of homesickness, she began to paint from her dreams and imagination. Years later, warm golden sunlight brought her outdoors with her easel for a two year period in the south of France. But her relationship to the mystical, emotional dimension of painting that she took refuge in while in Ireland would come to life again. After nearly 10 years of painting in the streets of Chicago, she brought her easel back inside. Cityscapes began to morph into dreamscapes, no longer merely descriptive of a physical location, but something deeper and mysterious.*

*She now lives and works in Evanston, painting in her home studio where two cats (now separated from the dog due to an "unfortunate" occurrence) work diligently to keep her in the studio, painting. Karen also paints dogs and cats, and accepts commissions for pet and house portraits.*

*[www.karenperl.com](http://www.karenperl.com)*