

Rad Art: A Journey Through Radiation Treatment

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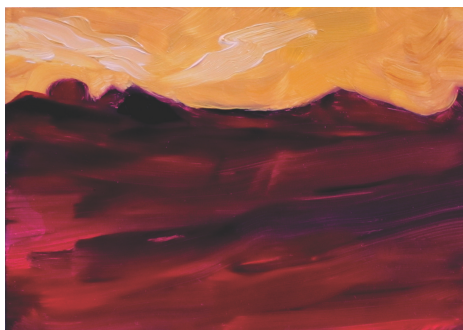
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RAD ART: A JOURNEY THROUGH RADIATION TREATMENT

SALLY LOUGHRIDGE

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010, I was startled, frightened, and anxious. After surgery, radiotherapy was recommended for 33 consecutive days (excluding weekends). As an artist, I decided to make a quick, small, and unplanned daily painting immediately after each radiation treatment to help me express, discharge, and cope with the overwhelming and unfamiliar feelings I was experiencing. I did not want cancer to become my identity! After treatment ended, friends and professionals encouraged me to create a book from these private paintings and their accompanying daily log. The American Cancer Society published this material as *Rad Art: A Journey Through Radiation Treatment* in 2012 (Atlanta, GA).

These oil paintings are the first two I created as my radiation course began. My goal was expression, not artwork *per se*. I allowed myself 20 minutes or less for each 5 x 7" painting in order to minimize rational thought. Indeed, the pieces seemed to flow from my brush without forethought or planning. Stirred by each completed painting, I wrote a few words to describe how I was feeling at that moment.

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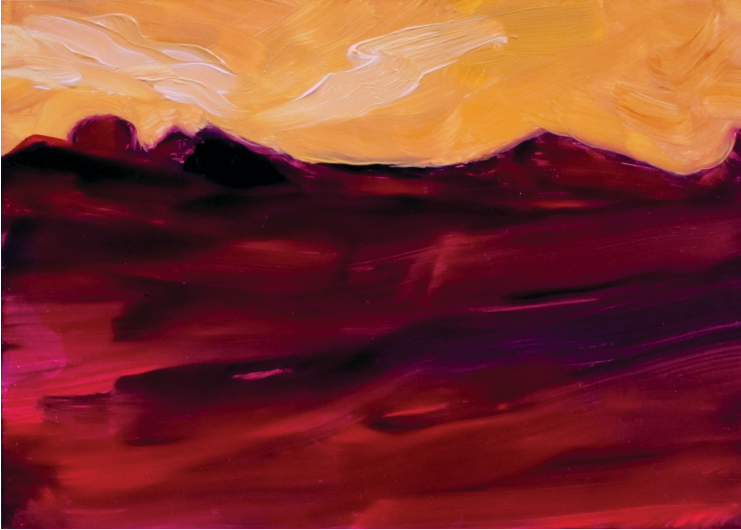
Day One: My Right Breast



"I had always thought of my breasts as a matched pair. But since I received a diagnosis of breast cancer, they have become distinctly individual. i am anxious about starting radiation, and I feel protective of my right breast—in a familiar, motherly way. in this first painting, i am startled to see how dark the interior is, full of the mystery and menace of the cancer cells.

One treatment down, thirty-two to go! Six and a half weeks feels like a very long time. I am glad I have started this series of paintings, but I am not sure how my near daily practice of studio painting will fare. I am already looking forward to my first weekend off treatment.

Day Two: My Terrain



"I started this painting full of raw emotions and uncertainty about the radiation process. Do I need it? Will it help me? Will it have long-term side effects? I am angry that I need more treatment, angry that I have cancer.

I loaded my brush with magenta and sculpted a mountainous terrain. The landscape quickly became my profile as I lay on the metal treatment table—arms over my head and knees elevated. I have to assume a very exact position and remain still during the treatment so that the rays can be precisely focused on the target area mapped on my chest. The jagged cloud shapes in the painting are the radiation beams aimed at my breast, coming from a huge, circling, and humming apparatus over the table. I have already begun to count the clicks and movements of the machine."