

How an artist leverages her passion to suppress fear

“At 2000 feet above the earth, as if dangling from a thread, all my attention is on the landscape below,” Jan says. “I haven’t forgotten my fear, but I set it aside as my husband dips the wing of the small aircraft so I’m better able to photograph the sights below.”



My Silver Lining No.3 by Jan Clayton

Her husband, Periklis Pagratis, began flying about six years ago. He earned his private pilot’s license in 2008. More recently he became a Certified Flight Instructor and is now teaching others to fly. He owns a small airplane and flies often. When he first began flying, Jan worried all the time

and would be in despair every time he went up.

“It took a while, but I knew the fear and anxiety that I was experiencing was my issue, not his,” Jan said. “I didn’t want my fears to inhibit his love and passion for flying in any way. Because I love my husband and wanted to participate in the activity he loves most, I began to fly with him last year. Overcoming fear is a process that seems to have no end. It’s still difficult for me.”

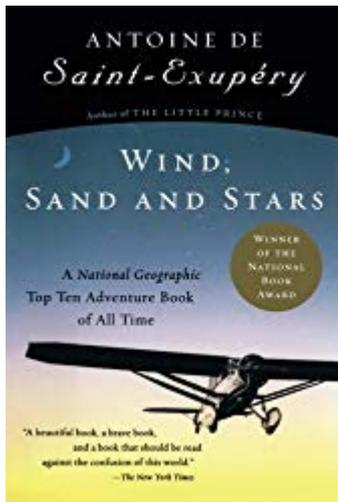
If you have a fear of flying, heights, darkness, dentists, needles, public speaking or something else, it may seem impossible to get over it. Embracing fear, on the other hand, is possible. When your passion or desire is strong enough, you can find ways to suppress fear. When you do, you have a chance to do something positive.



Merge No.1 by Jan Clayton

“I try to do this with a mix of diversion, trust and faith. I keep my brain occupied with something positive other than the concern about our safety. I trust my husband to handle that. My faith is strengthened by the magnificent beauty of the world around me, especially when viewed from above,” Jan said.

The aeroplane has unveiled for us the true face of the earth. The machine does not isolate man from the great problems of nature but plunges him more deeply into them. Antoine de Saint-Exupery in his book [Wind, Sand and Stars](#)



“My fear of flying in small aircraft slapped me in the face about five years ago when my husband became a pilot. I was destined to come face-to-face with this fear and learn to deal with it,” Jan said. “I knew I’d eventually have to fly with him. He flies all the time, but it took me almost five years to build up enough courage to go up in the air with him. When I finally made the decision to go, I took my camera. It wasn’t a conscious decision to overcome the fear, it was just a way to distract myself. Once I was up there, I saw so many gorgeous things going on in the landscape. I was captivated. I tuned into it immediately. It all happened by accident.”

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear. [Nelson Mandela](#)

“Although my fear is ever present, once we’re in the air and I see the landscape below, the voices in my head quiet down. The landscape below captures my attention and I’m compelled to get down to work with my camera,” Jan said.

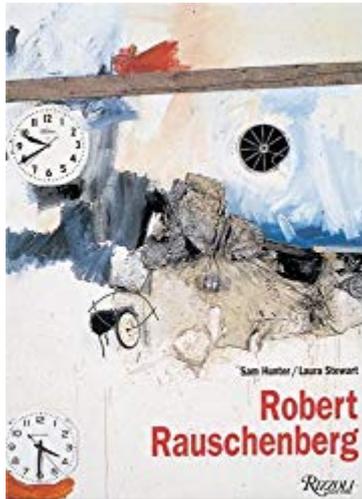
Her latest body of work is derived from fear, love and passion, all of which are enduring emotions in her life: fear of flying, love for her husband and passion for making art.



Tidal Salt Marsh No.2 by Jan Clayton

“At first, the idea of coalescing my passion with my fear seemed like an odd mix, but coming to the canvas from a new angle, literally a bird’s eye view, has magnified the breadth of the work,” Jan said. She’s inspired by artists who have passion along with commitment and perseverance.

One has to believe in what one is doing, one has to commit oneself inwardly, in order to do painting. Once obsessed, one ultimately carries it to the point of believing that one might change human beings through painting. But if one lacks this passionate commitment, there is nothing left to do. Then it is best to leave it alone. [Robert Rauschenberg](#)



"It's a strange conundrum to be aloft and detached, suspended in the air for an hour or so, then back on the ground with the surface of the earth underfoot. Seeing the earth from a different vantage point is so fascinating. The bird's-eye-view gives me unique information about the subject. In this case, it's the landscape. There's so much to take in. Because we're moving and the light is changing, I never know when or from where the next opportunity for a great photograph will appear," Jan said.

There's a constant state of movement you experience when flying in a small aircraft, not only because the airplane is moving, but also the surrounding natural world is changing.

"My preference is to be in the air very early dawn or late afternoon to dusk. From an artist's perspective, the light at this time is the most beautiful. The sunlight rakes across the landscape horizontally and defines the shapes of the trees, grasses, and other objects with long shadows. The colors aren't bleached out by the sun's harsh rays, but instead are almost glowing. The view from above is breathtaking. The waterways meander their way down to the ocean. The reflecting light on the surface of the water is in stark contrast to the land and saltmarsh. The tides are moving, waves are pounding, clouds are building, the earth is rotating and the light is fleeting."

“The first time I flew over Tybee Island, I realized just how small the island really is and just how vulnerable it is to the whim of the ocean, the weather and the inhabitants. When viewed from above, all the problems that people have with each other, all our differences seem so small and insignificant. Sometimes we forget that we are nothing but small invisible parts of a bigger picture.”

“This bird’s-eye-view vantage point is enlightening on so many levels. Perhaps my work will inspire others to become more interested in the history or ecology of the area. It inspired me. I have a deeper appreciation of the importance of keeping our environment healthy. Georgia has a stunning coastline filled with wetlands and barrier islands. There is beauty and diversity. It’s wonderful to be able to share the scenery from above and through this perhaps a few more folks will gain an interest in the Georgia estuarine marshlands and its importance to the health of our planet,” Jan said.

“Change is constant and focusing on what divides us is futile while focusing on what unites us is beneficial. It’s worthwhile to preserve healthy relationships with others and our natural surroundings,” Jan said.

Being an artist is celebrating life. [Henry Moore](#)

If it weren’t for her husband’s passion for flying, she never would have experienced these new landscapes. Her current work is a combined effort of her finding a new way to apply her passion from a new perspective—up in the air.



Jan and Periklis

She's not really over the fear, but it changes her focus when she's up in the air. She gets excited about what the landscape offers on that day. Despite her fear, now she wants to fly because each photograph adds to the overall body of work.

Currently, this collection contains photos of the area just below Tybee. She wants to go back up so she can shoot Tybee, St. Simons and Hilton Head. And she has her sights on other locations as well.



St. Catherine's Sound No.1 by Jan Clayton

Jan constantly draws inspiration from her daily interactions with the people in her life, her natural surroundings and the media. To her, art is about life. It's about processing experiences and interconnectedness with others and the environment. It is an endlessly fascinating and continually developing process of discovery, intuition, improvisation, and finally reconciliation.

Jan Clayton's works are featured at [Kobo Gallery](#), located in the heart of the historic district in Savannah, Georgia. You can also see more of her collection on her website at [JanClayton.com](#).



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that fear is not real...

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