Suddenly, quite recently, I experienced a painful struggle between life and death that made me realize that time is too short and I have too much to say. I started to paint again. Images are faster than words. I was ardent to paint how sad and how beautiful life is, how desperate and how divine, how frightful and how peaceful, how dark and how luminous life is.

- Oana Maria Cajal

I met playwright and visual artist Oana Cajal in November 2011 at a five-day projection design workshop held at Playwrights Workshop Montreal. The workshop was run by two extraordinary projection designers from Toronto, Beth Kates (www.bethkates.com) and Ben Chaisson (www.benchaisson.com), and I had enrolled in the workshop to see how digital media and graphics might enhance my work in the theatre.

Oana arrived at the workshop with a stack of postcards from a recent exhibition of her paintings at the Centaur Theatre Gallery in Montreal. The exhibition was called Posters for Unwritten Plays. The motto: “In the spotlight of DEATH, LIFE shines in its brightest colours! CELEBRATE! THIS VERY SECOND! RIGHT NOW!”

Here was a woman who was combining her passion for painting and her passion for writing in a very different way.

Over dinner later that week, I talked to Oana about her project, and what had compelled her to begin painting images for plays that have not yet been written. “Posters for Unwritten Plays, is going to be both a book and an e-book, featuring about 40 posters. Each poster will appear with a page of text that will include a list of characters, the time, the space and a short synopsis of the unwritten play. The title of the poster will be the title of a play.” The posters and ideas for the plays will be available when the book is published.

Trained as a painter in her youth, Oana had given up painting for a life in the theatre. After earning a MFA in drama and theatre criticism at the Institute of Theatre and Cinema Studies in Romania, she worked at the National Theatre in Bucharest for three years as a drama critic. Although she loved life in the theatre, she never liked being a critic - just like she never liked the colour brown. However, it was while she was working at The National Theatre that she was able to escape Ceausescu’s dictatorship in
Romania. With the assistance of the American Critics Association, Oana immigrated to the United States. After landing in New York, she flew to California, and earned another MFA from the University of California, San Diego, this time in Playwriting.

“The English language became my playground,” she said. At UCSD, Oana studied with theatre artists Des McAnuff, Robert Woodruff, Adele Shank, Anne Bogart, and Mac Wellman. Her transcultural plays, *East European Trilogy, Berlin, Berlin, Exchange at Café Mimosa* were written while she was a student there. *The Almond Seller* was produced in New York and directed by Tina Landau, Anne Bogart’s former partner.

Oana’s return to painting began two years ago when she found herself dealing with a serious health issue. All of sudden, time felt short. She felt she had too much to say, and too little time to say it. So she started painting again. Images are faster than words. And the best place to present them is the theatre.

“Theatre is the most alive place on the Planet Earth,” she says. “A place where people truly come together in the simultaneity of their shared emotions. A place where people dig, shoulder to shoulder, across the archaeological site of their forgotten beliefs, collective dreams, their fears and their hopes. A place where they discover that in the omnipresent spotlight of death, life shines always in its brightest colours.”

Readers who are interested in seeing Oana’s paintings and listening to her speak about her work can watch a short video of her exhibition at Centaur theatre, on You Tube, by putting “posters for unwritten plays.mpg” in the You Tube search engine.

To learn more about Oana’s playwriting and view her portfolio of art you can consult Oana’s website at: [www.oanacajal.ca](http://www.oanacajal.ca) Or you can contact her via e-mail: oana_cajal@hotmail.com