

Local Galleries Offer Art, Ambiance, Accessibility, and More

BY JOANNE BRIANA-GARTNER

Perhaps no words conjure up an image like the word artist. An artist is often shown as a person in colorful clothing and a beret. Talk about stereotypes! And what about the word gallery? A stuffy place, with overpriced art in ornate frames hanging on the wall where patrons don't talk above a whisper and maintain a healthy amount of space between them and the paintings. Perhaps some galleries are like that but not on Cape Cod where casual, down to earth, and friendly is the rule even in the world of art.

"I like what I do," said gallery owner and artist Jan Collins Selman, whose gallery on Main Street in Falmouth, in business for 13 years, showcases her own art as well as paintings, prints, photographs, pottery, and sculpture by other local artists.

Ms. Selman describes herself as a Cape Cod painter, painting harbors, marshes, beaches and boats, but she also does portraits and has a digital art series

entitled "The Garden of Eden," which focuses on multicultural images of women and the apple. She is also involved in the process of giclee, a process by which limited editions of paintings are created using high-end printers that spray pigmented inks onto paper, allowing for range and tonality in line with that of the original painting. Ms. Selman mats and frames her giclee herself, "it's all art-

ist done" she said, adding that most often she only creates 100 limited edition prints because she wants the customer "to have something of value."

In difficult economic times Ms. Selman said that it's important for galleries to carry some modestly priced work and to even branch out to offer other services. Ms. Selman has done photo restoration and reframing projects. "I do a little bit of ev-

erything," she said, which helps to bring people in and then build on those relationships.

Mimi Schlichter opened Mimi's Art and Reflexology on Palmer Avenue in Falmouth last June. The gallery features many beach scenes, ice cream trucks, beach chairs, children in colorful bathing suits, with the occasional cow portrait thrown in the mix. "What do I draw?" says Mimi on her website, "anything that will sit still long enough to be photographed!"

At Mimi's Art, paintings range from \$25 for a "mini" canvas to several thousand for a large oil painting. The gallery also sells prints and postcards made from original paintings. Unframed paintings can be

framed locally at shops like Cape Gallery Framers on Main Street in Falmouth or J Miller Picture Framers in Mashpee. Both of these shops also sell original art, photographs and prints by local artists.

Husband and wife artists Hillary Osborn and Doug Rugh opened the Osborn and Rugh Gallery on Queens Buyway in Falmouth in 2008.

"We're lucky to spend our summers studying the Cape shoreline," said Mr. Rugh, "it's a pretty good job. In the studio we make larger versions of the landscapes and they become a thing in themselves. The sense of scale takes you in and the compositions aren't just a snapshot but hopefully reveal im-

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Hillary Osborn and Doug Rugh in their gallery on Queens Buyway—their paintings include *Surf Drive Beach Roses*, opposite page, by Ms. Osborn, and *Melayna Color Study*, below, by Mr. Rugh.

expressions that come from many hours of painting in the field.”

At Osborn and Rugh they don't sell prints. “We decided some time ago that we don't want to do prints because what is important to us is handmade unique original works of art,” said Mr. Rugh. The gallery does sell small unframed figure studies, and oil sketches (most of them landscapes), signed by the artist, that are very affordable, putting art within all price ranges.

“It's very intimate,” said Ms. Osborn about the paintings. You can see individual brush strokes, you know the artist touched the work. “There's a personal connection.”

We've all heard about “buy local” campaigns that encourage us to shop for fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets and get to know who's growing our food.

The same is true for shopping at your local art gallery.

Many of our local galleries are artist-owned, meaning you are

likely to meet the artist if you visit the studio. Talking with the artist can mean learning about the vision or inspiration for a particular work.

Ms. Osborn agreed with the farmers market analogy, likening a piece of original artwork to an heirloom tomato. Say you buy a tomato in winter from a big chain grocery store, said Ms. Osborn, “all across America people are eating those same tomatoes.” But if you buy an heirloom tomato at your local farmers' market in summer, then it's going to be unique and special.

Visiting an artist-owned studio could also mean describing that view of South Cape Beach or Monk's Cove that you've always wanted a painting of and having a piece commissioned.

“I really like doing commission work,” said Ms. Schlichter. If a painting is for a summer resident's winter home, I ask them, “What's the spot you'd like to be looking at in January?” We have so much beautiful lo-

cal scenery, it's a way to connect with people,” said Ms. Schlichter.

Visiting a gallery often means seeing the artist at work.

On any given day passers-by can stop in and watch Ms. Selman at her easel as she concentrates on a work in progress.

For Ms. Selman, one of the most important aspects of her gallery is its accessibility.

She encourages visitors to come in and have a look and she enjoys answering questions. Ms. Selman welcomes children into the gallery and even into what she describes as her “artsy messy corner” where they might get to touch the work or even apply some paint to a canvas. I like to let them try, to hold a brush and see how it feels, said Ms. Selman, who added, “it's a really big deal to them.”

You can never know where involving a child might lead. Ms. Selman mused that if someone in an art gallery had encouraged her to participate in the art process when she was 7,





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Megansett View, by Mimi Schlichter

it would have resolved in her mind the question of whether or not she wanted to be an artist a lot sooner.

“I love to talk to moms and dads about the art, and to answer questions,” said Ms. Selman.

And forget that notion of an art gallery as a cold, sterile space where nobody talks above a whisper.

“It’s a comfortable place,” said Ms. Selman of her gallery.

“I enjoy talking to customers,” said Ms. Schlichter, adding, “I want to enable people to enjoy being here.”

To say that Mimi’s Art and Reflexology is inviting is an understatement. The shop is light and bright with floor-to-ceiling windows running along the front and a shop cat named Dora who might play a little piano for you if you’re lucky.

Having accessibility to galleries and the artists who own them is like getting a personal tour through a museum led by the curator, said Ms. Osborn. “There’s great art and knowledgeable people to talk to,” she said.

So when is an art studio not an art studio? When it’s a venue for other cultural events. A music series was held at Mimi’s Art last year and Ms. Schlichter has plans to continue bringing in musicians. “It’s all part of the philosophy of this space,” said Ms. Schlichter. “It’s about creativity.”

In addition to her art, Ms. Schlichter is also a musician. Recently she lent her expertise to the musical direction of the Falmouth Theatre Guild’s performance of “The Secret Garden.” She also serves as minister of music at Christ Lutheran Church in Falmouth.

The Osborn and Rugh Gallery has been the location for book signings and artist talks and has

held open houses and recitals featuring performances by the students of John Murelle, of which Mr. Rugh is one.

“For Doug and me it was important to work in this space and to show in it but also to have it available for other venues,” said Ms. Osborn adding that as a visual artist she also finds inspiration in literature and in music.

Sure, you can order up a Rembrandt print or a poster by Van Gogh and know that by textbook



Laundry Day, by Mimi Schlichter

standards it’s good, but art is about more than that. “Art is a very personal purchase” said Ms. Schlichter, “it either resonates or it doesn’t.”

“I always tell people that the more art they look at, the more they’ll get a feel for what they like,” said Ms. Osborn. “Once you choose a painting that you like, you’ll enjoy looking at it for a long, long time” she added.

Mr. Rugh’s advice was simple, “Buy what you love.” •



Real Me (blue jeans), by Mimi Schlichter