

Art Adventure I Sam Dalkilic-Miestowski

Laurie Schirmer Carpenter, landscape painter



The Steeple Gallery has the pleasure to introduce an artist new to the region, but not new to art. In her own words, Laurie Schirmer Carpenter discusses her journey to art.

I was born in northern Illinois, 100 miles west of Chicago, in the heart of farm country, in 1945. My father was a lawyer and my mother a homemaker.

Growing up with four brothers in the small town of Freeport was rather idyllic as I now look back on it, full of freedom, safety and a large, extended family. My brothers and I had a knack for drawing and my artwork was always chosen as an example in grade school. My high school didn't have an art program at the time, but I was always one of those asked to make posters, programs and bulletin board displays.

When I left for college in Denver, Colo., in 1963, art was perceived as a rather frivolous major, so I received a "more serious" BA in English Literature. I met my future husband in college (he was in the Air Force) and after our marriage lived in Denver for 27 years, raising 2 daughters.

Once our children were in school I felt free to pursue my lifelong interest in art, earning double degrees in Fine Art and Art History in 1988 from the University of Colorado at Denver. I have been painting and drawing since then.

A company transfer took us to Michigan in 1990. Returning to the Midwest made me realize how much I had missed the lush greenness of the landscape, the clouds that seemed to be close enough to touch, mist and fog, the incredible reds and oranges of autumn leaves and the simple geometry of farm fields.

I began to focus on landscape painting instead of the still life subjects I had previously been doing, trying to capture the



emotion of what I saw and felt on canvas.

Moving to northwestern Indiana in 2006 added Lake Michigan and the dunes to my list of subject matter.

A painting, for me, usually begins with a walk or a bicycle ride through the countryside. I love to see those places we tend to take for granted as we hurry past every day, getting on with our busy lives. I try to see with "new eyes," as the writer Marcel Proust termed it, to find the extraordinary in the ordinary.

I sketch and photograph these places, sometimes returning with paint to make color studies and sketches. The actual paintings are created in the studio away from the distractions of weather, insects, constantly changing light and the curiosity of passers-by.

A painting may be of a very specific place or be a composite of several places in order to depict the universality of the landscape. I apply the paint in layers, with each layer subtly changing the color beneath, until I have attained the play of light that reveals the land as I see it. I want my art to be immediately accessible to the viewer but believe that a deeper kind of awareness evolves from its contemplation.

While the land itself is timeless, a painting of the land is the result of its time and place. My oil paintings create a chronicle of the land but, first and foremost, they are paintings – ideas made visual. I am concerned with being true to the spirit of the place while creating my own personal vision of it.



Nature embodies a series of contrasts: dark/light, calm/turbulent, near/far, hot/cold, wet/dry, verdant/barren, colorful/bleak, etc. – features that can exist simultaneously and that I find so compelling in the landscape. Capturing the interplay of contrasts in color and form on a two-dimensional surface is the continual challenge. It is demanding and soul searching work – it is called a work of art, after all.

I have been influenced by the paintings of the 19th century German Romanticist Caspar David Friedrich. He portrayed not only the beauty inherent in the landscape, but its vastness and captured such a sense of quiet and stillness that viewing the paintings seems a form of meditation.

The Luminist painters of the Hudson River School also intrigue me. The rich-



ness, light and atmosphere they brought to their paintings is a constant source of inspiration.

I know that I am privileged to be able to pursue this passion called painting, to be doing what I love.

To view more works by Laurie Schirmer Carpenter, visit the Steeple Gallery, Ltd., 11107 Thiel St., St. John. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Closed Sunday and Monday. All other times by appointment.

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