

Plein-Air Event Engenders Enthusiasm for the Arts

By Jim Pelgrift

The sweet, musky odor of fresh oil paint permeates my office and tickles my nostrils as I write these words. Glancing over my shoulder, I observe the warm September

ple product of her creative efforts electrifies my sensations and evokes the breathtaking moment when land, sea and sky suddenly ignite with vibrant color, infused by the emerging sun.

Ms. Buist was one of more than 40 accomplished local painters who participated in the Rye Arts Center's seventh annual "Painters on Location" Plein-Air Paint-Out and Live Auction Saturday, Sept. 15. The artists all fanned out in the morning to various scenic spots to paint in the open air, and then returned to the Arts Center with their creations in time for the paintings to be framed, hung, and sold at a live auction in the evening. By 6 p.m., the 51 Milton Road building was humming with a throng of enthusiastic art-lovers, eagerly anticipating the newborn generation of oils, acrylics and watercolors.

From the auction's outset, a broad array of collectors bid aggressively for vir-

tually every piece, egged on by the skilled banter of auctioneer Jim Carter. Together with a silent auction of existing works by the same group of artists, the event produced art sales of more than \$80,000, a new record for this annual function. A substantial percentage of the proceeds will bene-

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Two perspectives of Edith Read Beach, Sept. 15, 2007. Works by Kathy Buist, top, and Donna Prizzi, bottom.

sun bursting through the clouds, appearing to illuminate the room. In reality it is not the sun and clouds at all, but rather a large flat Masonite panel. An artist named Kathy Buist had lugged this hefty board out to Edith Read Sanctuary yesterday and smeared it with bold streaks of color, using a giant brush. Just one day later, this sim-

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fit the Rye Arts Center and its educational programs.

This uniquely compressed intra-day sequence of artistic creation, appreciation, and acquisition is an extraordinary experience for all involved. The spontaneity and familiar subject matter of the artwork, exhibited and sold before the paint dries, results in a gathering that pulsates with energy, immediacy and freshness. It epitomizes the unique mission of the Rye Arts Center, and it exemplifies the tremendous value the organization contributes to our community. The Painters on Location program, like the Rye Arts Center itself, serves to establish an intimate connection of the beauty, passion, and spirit of artistic expression with our daily lives.

In this vein, the POL event pro-

vides a special opportunity for collectors and other art-lovers to meet the artists in person, and to share the day's experiences. I had the pleasure of chatting with Donna Prizzi, an artist who had chosen to paint that day on the Edith Read shore, "cheek-by-jowl" with Ms. Buist. Though the two women had selected the identical site, they painted in opposite directions. Their differing perspectives and distinctive styles produced two uniquely personal expressions of the stirring moment shared on that beach. As we conversed, Ms. Prizzi bubbled with the excitement and gratitude an artist inevitably feels when she witnesses others appreciating and enjoying her work.

More typically the personal connection between artist and audience occurs at a substantial expanse of space and time. Indeed, the genius of the greatest painters of all time is measured by their ability to speak profoundly to viewers from different eras and cultures. If the virtuosity of the Painters on Location artists was not quite of the standard of the great masters, it was most certainly sufficient to create high-quality paintings that could connect emotionally and spiritually to art lovers of the local community.

Painters on Location has justifiably attained the status of one of the most popular social/fund-raising events in Rye. It has recently attracted the attention of American Artist magazine, which highlighted the Rye Arts Center event in an article on plein-air painting in its October 2007 issue. The article emphasizes the distinctive elements of spontaneity, immediacy and chance that infuse the plein-air experience with extra pizzazz.

The article concludes with an apt quote from Marilyn Gasparini, the RAC Board member who spearheaded the Painters on Location effort: "We hope for perfect weather, great paintings, and hundreds of eager collectors. We do our best to realize all three, but we never know what will happen until the day of the event. That's part of the excitement and fun of it all."