

FEATURED ARTIST

JoEllen Murphy

The first inkling that I had a calling to become an artist came in the second grade: My teacher told my mother to forget the piano lessons, drawing was my talent.

Yet it wasn't until years later that I truly became a painter. In fact, some people would say I'm quite new to the art scene. However, I was fortunate to have a job that prepared me for this new venture. I was a staff artist turned art director at The Washington Post for 24 years.

Prior to my job at the Post, I received a BFA from the Rochester Institute of Technology in Medical Illustration and illustrated textbooks for four years at the Boston University School of Medicine. I also did many medical and scientific illustrations for the Post, especially in the my early years there — the mid 1980s. (My claim to fame: Illustrating both Ron and Nancy Reagan's various surgeries!)

A couple of things have really helped me with my art over the years. The first is working from life. I took five months of Tuesday night figure drawing classes in 2006-07 at the Yellow Barn Studio in Bethesda. I also took two oil painting classes at the Washington Studio School (still life as well as the figure) in 2009. Working from life is essential for training your eye for drawing and painting.

The second thing was my publication design work. While working as a page designer at the newspaper, I was honing my sense of color and composition in preparation for a second career in fine art without even realizing it. I was commissioning illustrations from top artists and winning awards for layout and design.

In 2008 I took a buyout package from the newspaper while still young enough to pursue my passion to paint.



Foothills



Brady



Red Farmhouse

I have taken pastel workshops with Susan Ogilvie, Margaret Dyer, Doug Dawson and Richard McKinley. Each has given me great advice on technique, composition and color. I can still hear their voices while creating my art: Margaret telling me, "It doesn't matter what color you pick, it's about the value." Doug saying if it's a "what's it" (meaning what IS that thing?) don't incorporate it into your painting. Susan saying "that's a Caribbean sky on an northeast landscape, JoEllen, you need a blue violet!" Richard with his pearls of wisdom guiding us all last fall in Leesburg to paint landscapes with atmosphere and emotion.

Some of my favorite things to paint? A woman in a chair so you can "feel" how at ease she is; a pair of boxers, one old and regal, the other younger, poised to pounce; the glow of a hillside near a rural Virginia vineyard on a bright September day; and the alley across the street from me with the mystery of night approaching.

I cannot tell you whether I am more of a portrait artist, landscape artist, figure painter, or even an oil painter. The art world is wide open to me now and I plan to pursue it all with vigor and enthusiasm. Who says life stops after a retirement or a buyout? My life as a painter is just beginning.



Bella and Buster



Contemplation