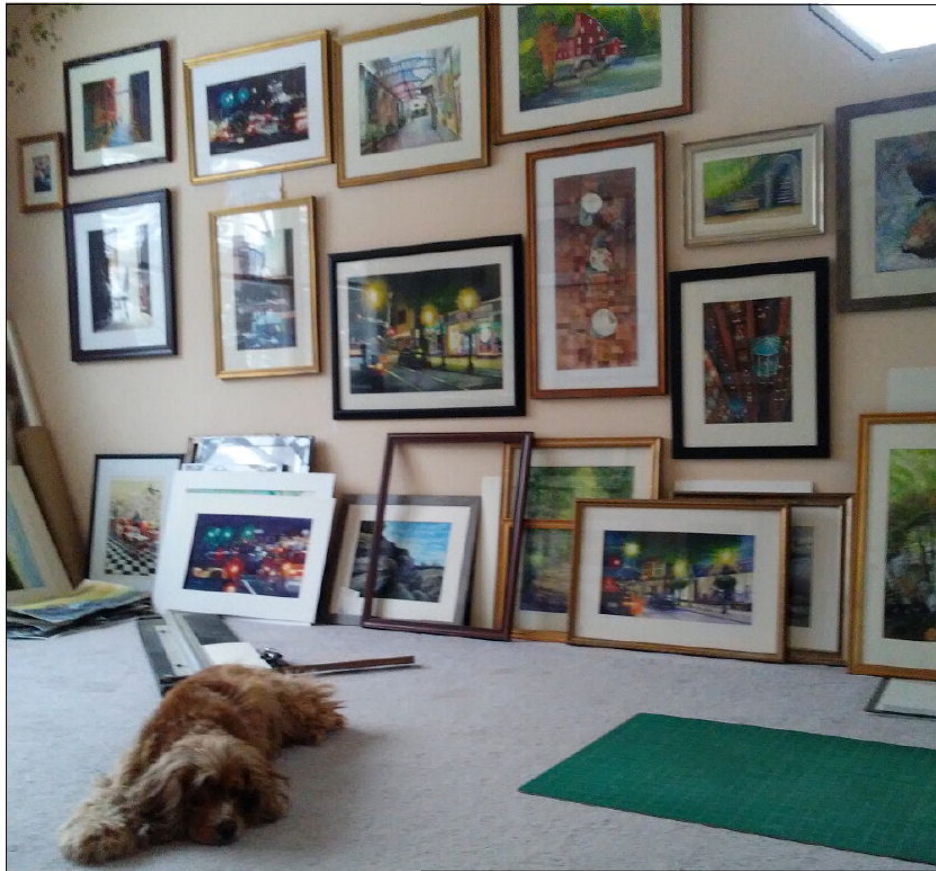


MIXED MEDIUMS

Artists found creative outlets and frustration during pandemic



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Art on display at Susannah Hart Thomer's Studio.

By M. English

For MediaNews Group

PLYMOUTH » As they look back from the one-year mark, local artists say COVID-19 has affected their work in a variety of ways.

Plymouth Meeting painter Susannah Hart Thomer says art has allowed her to focus on “something positive and wonderful during this terrible time.”

“For me...it fills the time with the happiness and luxury of creating, developing and spending hours of time sitting on the floor doing my watercolor paintings...,” Thomer says. “Even

A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

if I...don't quite like the way the painting's developing, it doesn't matter. I just start over. It's a delight to go into

my studio in the morning and be surrounded by art (and) discuss my paintings with friends by emailing my work to get their knowledgeable views and opinions of it.”

Ambler's Lynn Hoffmann has found “more time to reflect” and experiment with new techniques and materials in her Hand and Wheel Pottery studio. For example, “materials other than clay to make larger outdoor sculptures that don't require clay or a kiln.”

“It really has been kind of nice to think and dream way out of my normal box but sad to not see others

as much in the beginning,” Hoffmann says. “After I experiment with new things, I bring them to my students, who love seeing new things. (It) feels really good to be so open to new ideas and let possibilities enter into existence. For me, nothing is worse than repeating the same things over and over. I love to experiment and learn.”

Despite her cheerful outlook, Thomer acknowledged “the seeming foreverness” of the pandemic, and others shared parallel sentiments.

Conshohocken Art League's Eileen McDonnell

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recalls a quick visit to CAL's studio at Mary Wood Park House last November as "truly surreal...something out of a dystopian novel."

"The children's paintings were still splayed on the tables...some chairs askew, some paint containers scattered near each student's work," McDonnell says. "Reference books for that project were still opened. Everything was covered in a light dust, some cobwebs here and there, some new water damage cracking the ceiling, insanely quiet. It was as if some bomb had dropped and left everything in suspended animation."

Zoom picked up some of the slack, but the format wasn't a universal remedy for CAL's usual in-person classes, especially live model sessions when "the lighting and three dimensional quality of working from life was distorted by the lens and arbitrary camera angle of the instructor," the local painter says.

One positive, McDonnell notes, "the pockets of adult artist groups who now meet each week online to share their personal projects...no pressure, just sharing inspiration, contacts, techniques, material sources (and) art news."

Initially, the pandemic stopped Whitemarsh Art Center's Charlotte Lindley Martin in her tracks.

"March 13, 2020 - Lockdown - I stopped making art," Martin remembers.

She returned to "the studio energized and engaged" in May when she and fellow WAC staffer Matt Courtney began making ceramic hand-building videos for online tutorials.

"We were educating from afar, and the result was our students were creating art," Martin says. "Inspired by my granddaughter, I made videos for children. Next came live Zoom classes. Planning



SUBMITTED PHOTO

"Urban Lifestyle" by Betz Green.

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— Lynn Hoffmann

a weekly lesson making templates, trying out forms, finding inspiration for them, putting them on Pinterest and testing underglazes using mason stains."

All of which increased her "knowledge base" and allowed Martin to learn "alongside my students." As part of that: "I am gratefully using the new-found knowledge garnered by teaching and experimenting...making small sculptures, taking risks and embracing the changes. In my isolation, I am making art that is for me."

Fellow WAC artist Jeanine Pennell also learned to adjust after her "entire calendar of art fairs and shows was wiped clean."

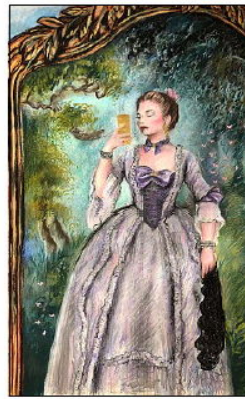
"I had nothing to look forward to, but I knew I needed to continue to create," Pennell says. "I decided to focus on creating a single body of work that had its own theme,

sort of my own thesis... (and) set out to create a minimum of seven pieces that at some future time would be shown together. I missed travel the most, so I aimed my focus in that direction and began a series I entitled 'Absurd Travel.' Long stretches in the studio have afforded me the freedom to try new techniques and create larger pieces."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Lynn Hoffmann with students at Hand and Wheel Pottery.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

"Les Papillons Roses" by Jessica Libor.

Pondering the pandemic's "impact on millions of quarantined individuals" as well as the concept of "the selfie as a self-portrait" during physical isolation inspired Greater Norristown Art League painter Jessica Libor's stylized portraits of women.

"I was particularly inspired to do this series because of the impact on millions of quarantined individuals," Libor says. "With nowhere to go socially, how do we as individuals still express our creative personalities through our styling? Does it still matter to get dressed up if no one will see you? How does creating a selfie with your cell phone mimic the process of creating a work of art? Many things are the same: Choosing the elements, composition, lighting, colors and subject matter."

In the end, "in many ways, the selfie and the self-portrait are the same thing: The artist's version of themselves that

they want to reveal to the world. Through blending of fantasy and reality, they can be perceived as who they aspire to be. How does creating an idealized fantasy world surrounding you create relief psychologically? Is it escapism or creativity?"

At first, GNAL's Betz Green viewed quarantine as "an unexpected treat to be able to spend endless hours in the studio."

"Well, that sense of euphoria lasted a couple of weeks," Green says. "Then, reality set in. I was working in a vacuum with no museums, no art shows, no art classes, no friends. Production fell off drastically for a few months until the world slowly began to once again open up, presenting opportunities and other people. The pandemic itself does not influence my work. I do not allow it to enter my studio space or my head space when in the studio."