

SUNDAY

ARTS & STYLE



Tyler Sizemore / Hearst Connecticut Media

Jan Dilenschneider's work is a unique expressionistic style, inspired by nature and the changing landscape around her Darien home. She recently held her seventh solo exhibition at the historic Abbaye Saint-André in Avignon, France.

A homecoming, of sorts

JAN DILENSCHNEIDER SEEKS A GALLERY SPACE ON THIS SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC

By Jo Kroefer

The brown-haired boy in a prim red-and-white school uniform slumps in his chair. He cannot stand to be posing for the portrait. Only a mother would notice the scuff marks on his shoe, betraying some secret mischief that he was up to before sitting before the portraitist.

Which Jan Dilenschneider, his mother, does point out. The portrait of her son hangs almost front and center inside the door to her palatial home in Darien. Slowly, other pieces of art come into focus: a marble bust, a Chinese porcelain vase, more portraits and antique furniture.

Jan and her husband Robert Dilenschneider, who started the eponymous communications group in New York City, have an art collection that is a prelude to her own work. Her paintings have a permanent place in a Parisian gallery, and sometimes go on shows throughout France. Now, she is looking to expand to Connecticut.

Her studio is at the back of the house and up a set of stairs. Natural light streams in through huge windows, which give an unobstructed view of a green

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Contributed

My Favorite Deluga Whale; 36" x 36"; Oil on Canvas 2019



Dilenschneider's work is a unique expressionistic style, inspired by nature and the changing landscape around her Darien home. She recently held her seventh solo exhibition at the historic Abbaye Saint-André in Avignon, France. Below, Dilenschneider poses outside her home studio.

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Arts

A HOMECOMING, OF SORTS

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lawn that fades into the blue water of the Long Island Sound.

Here, she paints tree-lined alleys and close-ups of big leaves, not because they are pretty, but because she wants to express how these scenes make her feel. The alleys fade into white because she is thinking about death and wonders what the dying see. The big leaves have an intricacy that she hopes will let viewers fall in love with nature "all over again."

Lately, she has drawn nearer to the ocean for new inspiration. Now, she is ready to dive in.

"Everything I had done before was above ground," she says. She gestures to all her paintings in the studio.

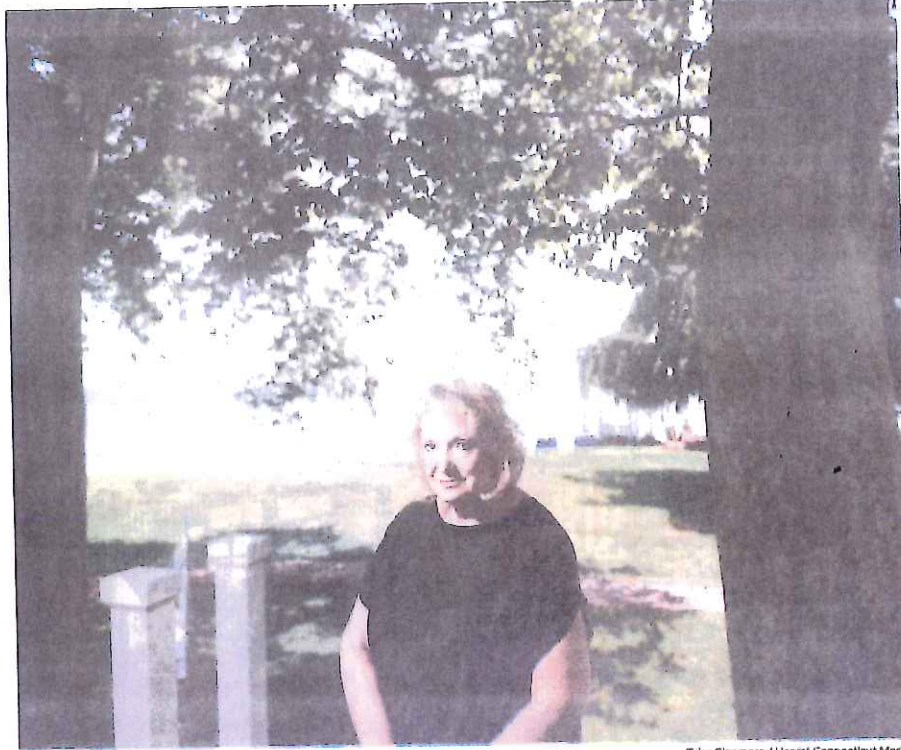
After spending time at the Mystic Aquarium, where she met a penguin, pet a beluga whale and admired frogs, turtles and fishes in a forest of lily ponds, she is thoroughly convinced that the ocean is the key to the ecology.

"If the ocean goes, there is no way that life could be sustained as we know it," she says.

The Great Pacific Ocean Garbage Patch, a loose confederation of litter about the size of France, has captured her interest of late. The idea of painting the "island" — made of plastic bags and fishing nets, among other trash — intrigues her, though she prefers suggesting the importance of the ecology to bashing it over people's heads.

"I don't want to scold people, but I do want them to become more aware," she says.

Paintings inspired by her experience at Mystic Aquarium will be showed in the public gallery space of the new Milne Ocean Science and Conservation Center. Viewers can see Dilenschneider's work for one day during a public showing. For the rest of the time her work is on exhibit, it will be



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for students enrolled in the preschool and their parents coming and going.

"Jan Dilenschneider has long been a stalwart supporter of Mystic Aquarium, contributing her talent and philanthropy to support Mystic Aquarium very many years," says Stephen M. Coan, the president and CEO of Mystic Aquarium in a statement. "We are incredibly proud to host a gallery showing of her internationally renowned work."

Dilenschneider follows local artist Michelle Marra, whose artwork debuted the new gallery.

"We incorporated a gallery space in the Milne Ocean Science and Conservation Center to celebrate nature through art," Coan says. "We believe art is

additional catalyst to accomplish our important mission to inspire others."

Back inside the studio, Dilenschneider has laid out a porcelain set for coffee. Every part features thick, bright lines of blue and yellow.

"They sing," Dilenschneider says. This is how she describes the harmony she hears and feels when artists bring together two complementary colors. The set was designed by the French post-impressionist Claude Monet, who — if she could — she would very much like to invite to a dinner party, along with American expressionist Franz Kline and French post-impressionist Henry Matisse.

Her compositions always features colors that sing, as well as innovative gesture

lines. She paints with her whole arm, using her fingers to scratch grass patches, and window squeegees to form big swooping leaves and streams. She considers herself an expressionist artist, but has found her work becoming more abstract.

"Every painting is abstract underneath," she says.

When she thinks of famous painters, she prefers to emulate someone like Picasso, who had multiple periods and always tried out new techniques, over someone like Jackson Pollock, who was very successful, but he only had, she says, one look.

Her friends, Michael and Hazel Hobbs, have known the Dilenschneiders for years and during that time,

have watched Jan evolve as an artist.

"She doesn't just take a brush and dip it into paint," Michael Hobbs says. "She's gotten very serious."

Dilenschneider has one goal for 2020: To find a gallery in Connecticut that is as strong as her Paris gallery. In Connecticut, most people do not know her artwork is available for purchase, but in Paris, she sells to more collectors, she says.

Still, her main goal is not to sell. "In fact, I have a really hard time when they go out the door," she says.

Some of her friends in the area have purchased her art. Richard Edlin says he and his wife feel like they got in on the ground floor with her.

"It's unusual to find an

artist that is so comfortable both with working with tranquility and energy," he says. "She is technically good at painting, but what has always appealed to me about her work is this contrast between vibrancy and peace. That is very much the world around us and she has an incredible ability to translate that."

Hobbs and his wife, who have different tastes and can disagree over what art to purchase, bought a set Dilenschneider made that had a more representational piece that Michael liked, and a more abstract one that Hazel liked.

"Every day since, we've walked into the room and have been really thrilled that we bought both," he says. "We've come to appreciate the other's choice."

Dilenschneider grew up in a creative family. Her mother produced work that was "of her time," but she remembers posing in ballet shoes while her mother sketched. Her two other sisters were also gifted artists, but only she has pursued it professionally, and even so, only later in life.

The little boy in the portrait hanging in her home, and his brother, in a portrait in the next room, have long since grown up. Hobbs says being in this stage of life has freed Dilenschneider up to pursue art seriously.

She represents many women of her generation who had an early interest that fell by the wayside when life — raising children and supporting her husband's business — happened, he says.

"Who has a time to set up a studio, to get the muse talking to do the work, and to get cleaned up and get to the PTA meeting?" he asked. "But then the itch was strong enough that she came back and scratched it as her kids became more independent."

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