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Profile

'Dualities' color work of Darien artist

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

"Dualities" are an ever-present reality for painter Jan Dilenschneider, and they're also the theme of her upcoming exhibit at the Bellarmine Museum of Art at Fairfield University, opening June 4.

Area residents will immediately recognize Long Island Sound and its environs in her expressive landscapes and still-lives of beach grass, tidal marshes, trees and the ever present experience of the water. Her paintings have earned praise for their almost numinous color that reveals the ordinary landscape as excited by natural light.

She has the unique ability to capture quiet, almost imperceptible movement—a mild breeze vibrating beach grass or the undulations of still water as it gathers reflections and colors.

For the Darien artist, painting itself is a kind of duality because it begins with a personal vision that is created in the solitude of her studio, but eventually goes on to a life of its own viewed by the general public or sold to a buyer. Likewise she wrestles with the



DUALITIES; Silver Birch near the Water I and II. "I often paint in pairs to keep the strokes fresh," says Jan Dilenschneider.

her artwork at the prestigious Galerie Pierre-Alain Challier for the third year. The show opens in Paris on the week of July 7.

"Painting in pairs" is how

the Annual Catholic Appeal, she was recently honored at the annual Ladies Luncheon to benefit the Catholic Academies of Bridgeport. She delighted committee members when she donated four of her paintings to this year's auction, which raised over \$115,000 to support scholarships for the children enrolled in Bridgeport's four Catholic schools.

"It's tough to part with the work, but great to know that the paintings translated directly into scholarships for young people in the inner city," says Dilenschneider. "The schools do so much to help the children and give them a better life."

The University of Ohio graduate began painting as a young girl, encouraged by her mother who was also an artist. She had formal training in prestigious New York and Chicago art schools and also credits Silvermine Arts Guild for its excellent programs. Among the formative influences in her approach to art, she cites the abstract expressionist Franz Kline and Matisse.

As Jan Dilenschneider prepares for two shows this summer, there's one duality that she entirely welcomes—the guidance of the other half of the Dilenschneider

duo, her husband, Bob.

"He is one of my big motivators. I'd still be painting my pictures and putting them downstairs if he didn't get me out there. He's been so supportive, helping me with writing artist statements and other projects. He's really my manager. It's just his nature as a person to be totally supportive."

The Dilenschneiders have endowed fellowships for art scholars from repressive countries through the Institute of International Education, which administers the Fulbright scholarship program for the U.S. Department of State. "I am fortunate to help the cause of freedom of expression for artists worldwide through the Janet Hennessey Dilenschneider Scholar Rescue Program in the Arts," she said. "This year, we helped an artist from Syria, along with her husband and two sons."

(Admission to the Bellarmine Museum of Art is free. Hours are Monday-Friday, 11 am-5 pm when the university is in session. In June and July, the museum is open 11 am-3 pm, Tuesday through Thursday. In August, it is open by appointment only. The Bellarmine Museum of Art is located in Bellarmine Hall on the campus of Fairfield University, 1073 North Benson Rd., Fairfield.)



desire to share her paintings with the world, but also hold them close as her own creations.

Given the strength of her recent shows in Paris and the growing interest in her work (she is the subject of a story in the upcoming Art New England), she may have a hard time holding on to them.

In addition to the Fairfield University gallery show that runs from June 4 through September 18, she has been invited to exhibit

she describes one of her favorite methods for approaching a subject. She sets up side-by-side easels and moves from one to the other as she explores the possibilities for the scene. Some pairs are intended to be seen almost touching—true diptychs—while others, separated but proximate, still express to the viewer their mutual affinity.

A member of St. John Parish in Darien and former chair (along with her husband, Robert) of

Jan Dilenschneider on painting:

PAINTING OUTDOORS: The truth is you often can't paint in the plain air in Connecticut. Sun gets in your eyes, bees sit on your canvas, pollen sticks to the paint and wind blows your easel down.

ON SEEING BEFORE PAINTING: Often in my mind, I see something long before it goes on the canvas. I like the Monet quote that he did about 90% of his painting without a brush in his hand. That's very true. Sometimes the paintings are already in your mind; we just don't have them on the canvas.

PUSHING PAINT AROUND: I like the freedom of breaking the rules to achieve a desired effect with the paint. I'll paint with squeegees, chopsticks, kitchen cake spatulas, my fingertips—anything to liberate the canvas.

BEING SPONTANEOUS: There's something about the creative process and I believe it's true for musicians and writers; you always want to have an element of surprise and irregularity. You want to be as spontaneous as you can be when you put the paint down.

KEEPING IT FRESH: I often paint in pairs because I can try something on the first canvas and then try something else on the second as I go back and forth between them. My reason is to keep the strokes fresh. I want it to look like it's still growing, wet, alive.



Artists palette