

Artist Takes Stock, Opts For Painting

By Tammy Paolino

READINGTON TWP. — Cara London spent seven years working as an over-the-counter trader on Wall Street while dreaming about painting mountains, forests and coastal scenes.

When she found out she would be moving to rural Hunterdon after her summer wedding, she decided to quit her job and take up her paintbrush full-time.

"I just love my art too much to consider commuting every day," she says.

"After working on Wall Street with one foot out the door for so long, it's great to be doing something I love," she says. "I used to work 40-plus hours a week reading financial statements and still found time to paint."

Now she can spend hours sitting on her back deck painting whenever she pleases with the thick, rich acrylics she likes so well.

Her work will be on display at the Bernardsville Public Library during January and will be featured in an exhibit at Gallery 39 in Flemington in February.

Her home is filled with her work. A spare bedroom contains stacks and stacks of canvasses and every wall displays finished rural landscapes or colorful still lifes.

"I have trouble getting rid of things," she explains as she shuffles through a pile of paintings in an upstairs hallway. "I just recently started looking at the old

ones and saying, 'I can paint over this.'"

While she paints tranquil beach scenes in subdued watercolors, she primarily works in acrylics.

"The colors are just delicious," she says. "They're as rich as oils, just luscious."

In Hunterdon only a few months, she participated in a recent art show sponsored by the Tewksbury Township Historical Society, painting pictures of local farms. She paints on location, rather than working from sketches or photographs.

"When I'm out, I like to lose self-consciousness and do one painting after another," she says. "It's when I get really lost and have to find my way out that I get something interesting, a surprise."

Born on Long Island, she lived in Manhattan most of her life.

"I was always good at art," she remembers, "but I wanted to do all the other things 'normal' kids do. The one painting class I took was very uninteresting to me. It was so clinical, it really stifled my creativity."

Then a high school friend signed up her up for a sculpture class.

"The idea of sinking my hands into the clay fascinated me," she says. "I figured my friend was going to do these great sculptures and I was going to bring home little doggies and ashtrays, but it wasn't like that. I really took to it."

Encouraged by that experience,

Arts & Entertainment

she went on to study art history at Brandeis University in Massachusetts and sculpture at New York Studio School. She later received a master's degree in sculpture from Parsons School of Design in New York.

"I wanted to fool around with paint the same way I had with the clay," she recalls. But some rule at the school prohibited sculptors from taking painting classes, so she had to put it off.

While she became more and more fascinated in her art work, she says she still didn't believe she could support herself that way.

"I'm way too conservative to live without health insurance," she explains.

Thus the Wall Street detour. In 1984, she heard about a painting group working with artist John Griefen, whom she now calls her mentor.

Although she gave up her Manhattan home when she married Exxon scientist Eric Sirota this summer, she still makes a weekly trip into the city to paint with the same group of artist friends.

"There is no way I could tell you how significant this on-going relationship with the group has been to my work," she says. "These are

people who paint solely because they love to paint. They push each other to do better and better work."

Her sculpting background is apparent in her work, in which thick layers of paint and the use of shadowing create a three-dimensional, sculptural appearance.

Ms. London has participated in a variety of artist workshops, including the Triangle Artists Workshop in Upstate New York.

"I also went up and spent two weeks outside of Calgary" in Canada. "The colors and landscapes are so different. I was at a loss there," she says. "I realized you are your environment, and you take it with you when you leave. I paint a lot at Fire Island, and I'm used to the richness of the colors that comes from the atmosphere. It was so vast there and so dry."

While she intends to spend most of her new-found freedom painting, she has also embarked on a teaching career. She teaches acrylics and life drawing at Hunterdon Art Center in Clinton, and plans to teach several art courses through Hunterdon County Adult Education this spring. She also teaches sculpture at the duCret School of Art in Plainfield.

She says she enjoys making art more accessible to her students.

"People are somewhat scared of art," she says. "It's not really a cerebral thing. It's a visual language. Sometimes it gets so esoteric, and it doesn't have to be. It's about taking pleasure in the visual world and recreating it. I would love for people to know that."

"Art is about going where you didn't expect to go," she says. "An interest in art gets you halfway there. Pushing yourself to keep doing better is the other part."

"I hope five years from now I'm doing paintings I can't even conceive of now."



Staff Photo by Karen Servis

PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST — Cara London uses acrylics to capture the view of trees from her back deck.