



NUANCE



PAM COULTER BLEHERT, SELF-PORTRAIT

BY TIM EINSTEIN

Reston artist Pam Coulter Blehert works outside, *en plein air*, creating local scenes and images from her travels. She also paints portraits, some of which are commissioned, in the studio. Many of her paintings are strikingly realistic, while others are quite abstract. Most of her work is done in oils and acrylics.

“Stream with Rapids, Autumn” is an impressionistic image featuring an acrylic foundation and an oil finish. “I sponge painted the rocks underneath, then painted over with oil so you get a mottling coming through,” says Pam. This painting, which was accepted in a 2006 show at The Art League in Alexandria, is typical of the artist’s imaginative colorization. It is one of those images that inspire the viewer to ask, “How, exactly, did she do that?” and then finds the answer in mood-evoking nuances of shade.

“Sunday Papers,” Pam’s abstract portrait of her mother, Olivia Coulter, was done very quickly, “in an hour or two,” she says. “My mother complained, ‘I don’t have a nose.’ I joked, ‘Well, that’s too bad.’ Over the years, I have learned to work more slowly, building up paint layers.”

Pam’s husband, poet Dean Blehert, is the fiercely focused subject of “Writer Writing.” The angles of his bearded face are solidly bent to his task. Though the work is rather realistic, the lines that Pam likes

to use in portraits are not evident here. She recalls having to paint her husband’s hands in a separate sitting: “He wouldn’t stop writing—he hasn’t stopped yet.”

A regular participant in The Art League’s juried group shows, Pam has won the “Best of Show” distinction three times with three very different works—a cartoon-like painting incorporating two poems by Pam and Dean, an impressionistic painting of the Unitarian Church in Washington and a portrait of drummer Louie Belluchi.

Pam’s “Southwester” portrays a young lady who modeled for a League of Reston Artists sketch group. It was “a difficult pose,” recalls Pam. Both painter and model persevered, allowing the viewer to meet the questioning gaze of the subject and get lost in the color-

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“SOUTHWESTER,” OIL ON CANVAS, 30” X 40”



ful array of fabrics and vessels. “Portraits that are not commissioned can be hard to sell,” admits Pam. “Generally, figurative art does not sell well. People want landscapes for their homes.”

Her award-winning work “Temple Farm Creek” was actually painted in the studio from photographs. The Loudoun scene is full of late-in-the-year light, yet it captures the contemplative mood of darker autumn colors. The astute viewer will approach the painting, notice the brushstrokes, then retreat to the focal point in order to take in the larger composition.

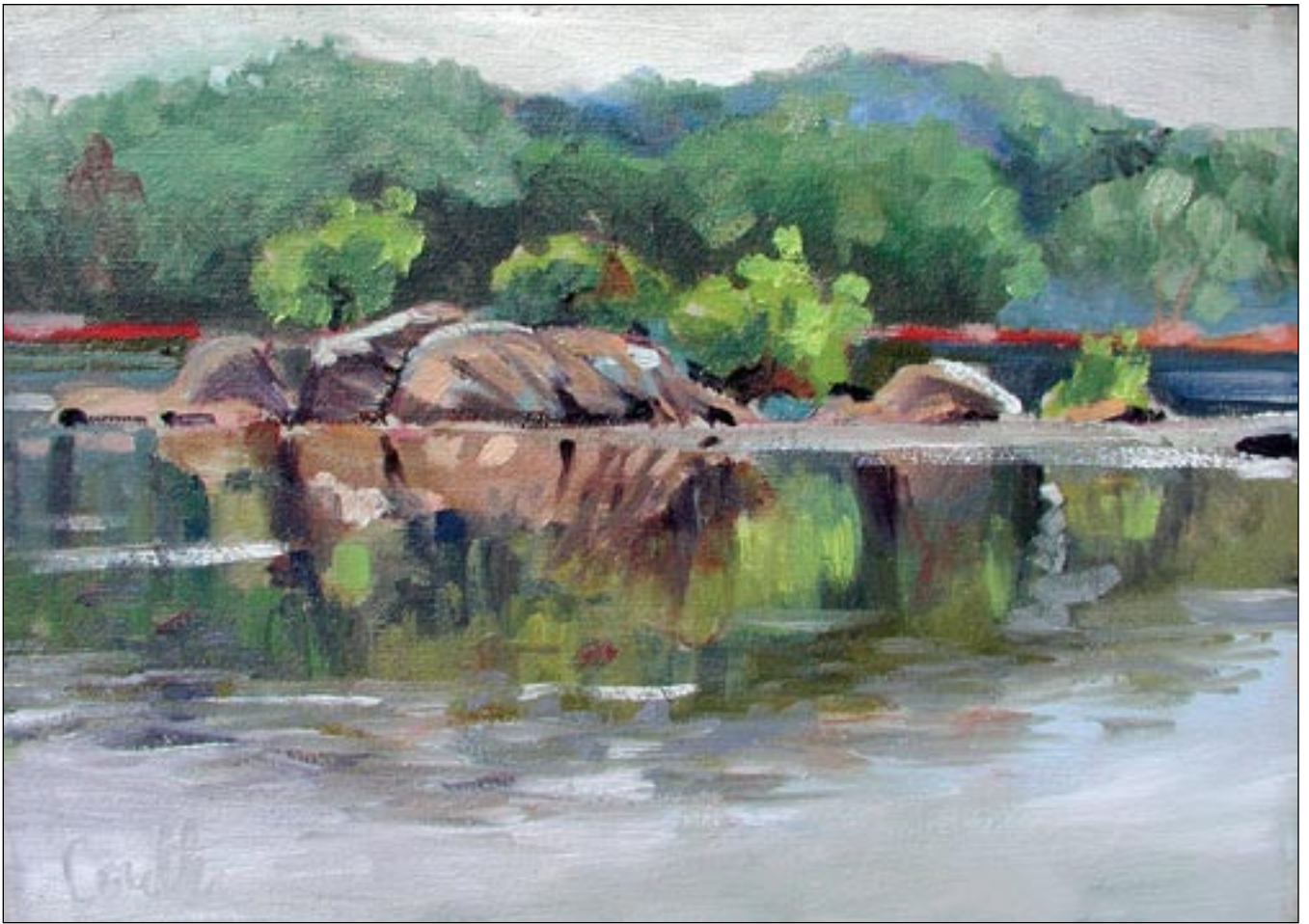
Pam especially enjoys producing waterscapes and has amassed a portfolio that includes rivers, creeks, boats and lighthouses as well as Caribbean panoramas. Two years ago, the



Jo Ann Rose Gallery in Reston mounted *Water Forms*, featuring 60 of Pam’s paintings completed over 42 years. “Water has always fascinated me because of its ability to change,” she says.

Pam studied drawing, painting and sculpture at Antioch College. She spent her junior year abroad studying art history at L’Ecole du Louvre in Paris. During summer sessions at American University, she met her first mentor, artist Ben Summerford, who chaired the AU art department for 30 years and founded the Franz Bader Gallery in Washington.

After school, Pam traveled to Greece where the bright sun and blue skies of the Aegean inspired her love of painting waterscapes onsite. The artist’s own sandaled toes can be seen in “Dinghy in Dry Dock,” an



early painting done with broad strokes and pale shades.

While she has won many awards in fine arts, Pam has also forged successful careers in computer graphics and illustration, Web design and maintenance, technical illustration and technical writing. She worked for the General Services Administration and other federal agencies for almost 15 years.

Pam's Web site, www.blehert.com, contains some of her own poetry, as well as poems and essays by her husband. She has also posted free art lessons and step-by-step instructions for por-

trait painting. The lessons are illustrated with examples of her own paintings in various stages of completion. Her blog, www.dearartist.blogspot.com, features draft chapters from an artists' workbook that she is writing. *E*

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP: "TEMPLE FARM CREEK (RT. 15) AUTUMN," OIL ON CANVAS, 24" x 30"; AND "WRITER WRITING," OIL, 24" x 18"; THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: "CLOUDY DAY, RIVERBEND," OIL, 8" x 10"; "LOUIE IV (THE DRUMMER)," OIL, 24" x 20"; AND "HOTEL, MIDWEST," OIL, 18" x 24"