

Pollie Painting Depicts Mackinac's Working Horses at Library Exhibit

In the draft horses on Mackinac Island, Elizabeth Pollie sees large, gentle servants that wait patiently for a new load, seemingly disinterested in the activities around them, yet always observing. In these horses she can find a poem.

"I'm truly awestruck by them," she said. "I think they comprise a sense of strength and beauty that I am completely awed by. The draft horse always strikes me as these kind of patient workers, and I see that over and over again. There is a certain sense of servitude about them that I feel a lot of compassion for."

So she paints them in all their moods, when they wait, when they haul sightseers or freight, at the end of their day, and she can't seem to shake her fascination with them.

A selection of Ms. Pollie's paintings will be on display through July at the Mackinac Island Public Library in a gallery showing entitled "Horsepower: The Horses of Mackinac." A reception opens the exhibit Thursday, June 29, from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.

The exhibit, she said, is to pay homage to the beauty of the horses on Mackinac.

"I want to give back to the Island here and say, 'This is what I see.'"

A former freelance illustrator and graduate of The College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Ms. Pollie now works and teaches from her West Wind Atelier gallery in Harbor Springs and paints in the representational art genre, or what she calls poetic realism.

"It's realism imbued with a sense of poetry," she said, "so it leaves space for a greater emotional response from the viewer."

She became interested in horses as a subject for her work during a week-long trip to Mackinac Island, where she had visited many times as "a typical tourist," but was on this trip taking the time to view the Island as a painter.

"My whole view of the Island was transformed," she said, "and as I was painting water scenes around the Arnold Dock, I was completely swept away by the horses, watching them, watching what they did on a daily basis, watching how the light changed their shadows, and realizing what a rare jewel Mackinac Island is."

"It truly was like an awakening for me," she said.

She had always thought that



Elizabeth Pollie with one of her Mackinac paintings, "A Rest, Well Deserved," which is now owned by Nancy and Bradley Chambers.

exotic places with exciting images to paint were a plane ride away, she said, "and to discover that something so visually exciting was no more than 40 minutes from my own home was just a tremendous gift, artistically and emotionally, and, since then, I've only grown more and more fond of it."

Capturing her images first on film, Ms. Pollie creates her paintings of horses in the studio from the photographs she takes in the field. That way she can freeze the light, the movement, the shadows, and then draw on her experience to compensate for the color and intensity.

"As a representational artist," she said, "it is very important to work on site, so you know what is missing from the photograph."

But to try to capture the horses live, she noted, would require that they stay put for at least an hour, and even then, the light and shadows would change during the composition and the action of the horse would be elusive.

"At a certain point," she said, "you are really departing from that photograph, and pretty early on you are departing . . . to push that, pull this, leave that out."

This, she said, is where the emotional content of the painting is added to the abstract content.

The abstract is the arrangement of shapes and values, values being the contrast between the lights and darks, the shades of black and white, what ones sees when taking the color out of an object and seeing how dark something is compared to the object next to it.

"That's how your brain really does read things," she notes; "not true colors, but true values. So the most important thing to make a representational painting be correct is to have the values correct, not the color."

On the other hand, she said, "because we are human, I am also looking at the emotional

** Please turn to page 7*

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