



Ageless Art

By Evelyn Preston

Grandma Moses move over. Recent studies champion the equally artistic accomplishments of many elderly. Having more time for contemplation, a wealth of experiences and accumulated wisdom enhances older people's creativity—often of professional caliber.

Proof positive is at the imposing Mercy Center Spiritual Retreat in Burlingame, CA, where 88 year old Marie Wagner, soft-spoken, super spry and immensely talented, achieves her latest goal—painting murals of all 21 California missions. The “canvas” for this artwork is as unusual as the artist—the wide landings of the stairwell in the main building where nuns used to pass and now Center guests can marvel at Marie's unique endeavor.

“As more people seek exercise as well as ‘going green’,” Marie says, “they skip the elevator and use the stairs—now they can enjoy the art.” What a pleasant surprise they'll get! The mottled walls conjure adobe stonework; earth tone mountain backgrounds or the bright green of furrowed fields tie the paintings to their environment.

Carefully researched mission images from long ago eras and sharp detail capture the reverent atmosphere. It's hard to believe that painting murals is a first for Marie.

Always drawn to the world of art, Marie wasn't encouraged to follow this “no money” career. Growing up in small town California, before and during the war years, she found pleasure working backstage on high school drama productions.

“It was my bliss,” she recalls, “and always such fun.” Earning an Education Degree at Stanford, her English and Speech majors allowed her to take over drama departments when she taught in the '40s before marriage and raising four children.

Marie's passion for fine art never abated. “I've always felt this great drive,” she admits, “and sometimes it's so strong I think I might burn up like a rocket!” Her creative enthusiasm grows. A member of POPs (Peninsula Outdoor Painters), a weekly group of non-critical artists, Marie's skill recreates the beauty of the Bay Area.

Always grateful, Marie says, “With the Mercy Center project, I was thrilled to be given a whole building to paint.” Practical as well as artistic, she quickly figured out

her own grid overlay system for transposing small sketches into approximately two by two and a half feet murals.

"I work three to four hours a day, a few days a week, and only paint as high as I can reach standing on terra firma," Marie assures us; "no ladders for me!"

Catherine Wilkinson, an amazing Mercy Center volunteer, historian, decorator or "Ms. Fix-it" as Marie calls her, cheerleads the project and ably assists Marie. They blend different paints and then preserve the finished mural by applying a colorless sealer. Over five months, their combined energy and talents have developed a smooth process—the distaff Michelangelos of Mercy Center!



Observant and innovative, Marie is open to new ideas yet her calm essence is as ageless as her art. "You have to be realistic," she says, recounting her traditional past while putting her avocation on hold.

"Just face facts. There's not only one way to live," she believes. "You put one foot in front of the other, follow your passion and move on."

Marie moves. Widely traveled, she enjoys friends and family, takes advantage of opportunities and reaches out to others. She's pleased to share her time and talent. "It has nothing to do with money, she's quick to add, "I've taken a trip in life I never expected and had a wonderful time. I'm happy to pay for it!"

Marie adds her positive mantra. "I've had excellent health, many blessings and good things have come to me; I feel very lucky."

Visit Burlingame's Mercy Center in person or online @ www.mercy-center.org to discover opportunities for individual or group conferences and spiritual retreats. Sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, this non-denominational center now offers an extensive calendar of year round programs such as poetry workshops, mindful bodywork and exploration of healing, growth and transformation. With oak-canopied and flowered paths, the Center draws people to its famous hand-built labyrinth for meditation and contemplation. Attendees will experience a calm, restorative atmosphere which includes private rooms and meals and can enjoy the extensive art collection and revolving exhibits. Special, low-cost retreat days encourage the spiritual life for one day or many. Group tour info: SBuckley@mercywmn.org.

Peninsula Outdoor Painters (POPS)

Painters of all skill levels who share a passion to capture the local Bay Area beauty are welcome to join this no rules, no cost, no critiques group. It only takes showing up and/or adding your email to enjoy membership of an established "mutual admiration society"—expert advice offered only on request. Bring a bag lunch and check the website for info: calendar, time, place and other 'Plein Air' groups, events and artists' websites.

http://www.pleinairlinks.com/Plein_Air_Links/POPs.html



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