

~ MASSEY FINE ARTS ~

“The Finest in Traditional Realism”

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La Vie Parisienne



Ann James Massey in her Ivry-sur-Seine atelier Photo Frédéric Bali © 2016

One of the challenges of being an artist in Paris is finding affordable atelier space. In 2009, when it became impossible to work any longer in a small corner of our 38 square-meter (410 square-foot) apartment where I had painted for 15 years, I started my artistic shuffle through five progressively larger and diverse shared studio locations starting near the Bastille in the 12th arrondissement; then in the 2nd in the heart of Paris; followed by a government owned building 10 minutes from our apartment in the 15th; next an artist’s top-floor loft in the 16th; and finally my current studio: a 21 square-meter (226 square-foot) space in a 1904 former workshop factory converted into artists’ studios in Ivry-sur-Seine, one metro stop outside Paris.

Not long after I moved into my 2nd studio, a shared business loft in an 18th century building a 10-minute walk from the Louvre, the descendants of the original inhabitants started visiting me in the late evenings. The first dapper chappie, quite elegant in his “taupe velvet jacket and tail,”



dapper in his “taupe velvet jacket and tail”

peeked around the corner of my bookshelf and with some encouragement eventually presented himself freely. After a few nights he started introducing me to his family. While I painted, they kept me company playing in my abundant ivy. They even agreed to pose for me as a possible late candidate for my painting. Unfortunately, the friendlier they were with me, the less they feared my fellow workers...and the more my fellow workers naturally feared their more obvious presence with the attendant concerns of an invasion. I explained to my co-workers that my rented 7.5 square meters (81 square feet) was a little Garden of Eden, and please, not to interfere with the visitors within my space. The difficulty for those adorable, intelligent, playful creatures (Walt Disney created Mickey Mouse for a reason) was they were now traversing through increasingly hostile territory to reach mine. One night, I made fast friends with a particularly diminutive friendly newcomer that I named “Bobby” and was horrified to see his body in a mousetrap the next morning. The architect with his spot next to mine was a smashing chap but had taken seriously the job of dispatching the little fellows. They had cleverly ignored all the pitfalls throughout the open loft; however, this trap was placed on the edge of my official space with efficient and deadly results. As much as I loved my splendid human companions, as well as my area with its elegant high ceilings and prodigious French window opening onto the street, I was unable to work peacefully on “The Blessing of the Animals” with

Bobby’s tiny crushed form in my mind’s eye. Before my arrival, the odd lone mouse had been viewed with amusement and tolerance. Knowing my presence and companionability was distinct cause for their demise, I commenced the search for studio No. 3.

Please don’t search for any of those gentle creatures in “The Blessing of the Animals” because I could not manage to fit a “church mouse” within my already finalized composition without it looking like an awkward afterthought. Picture the new abbot that was slapped on paper and squeezed into “The Wedding Feast at Cana” when Veronese’s painting was almost complete. Reference Massey Fine Arts Newsletter Vol. 8, No. 1, Winter 2000-2001: “Veronese & ‘The Wedding at Cana’”.

However, another of my earlier Parisian fauna encounters is included in the original composition.

One afternoon, I found a baby bird flat on his back near death in the courtyard of our apartment building. I ran up to our apartment, mixed a nourishing concoction, came back down, held him warm, force fed him and eventually the lids started to flutter. Then I called my better half Henri and asked him if I could rehabilitate a baby bird. He acquiesced immediately. After all, he knew my long colorful history of rehabbing birds before I moved to Paris. Plus, I had already saved a young stunned warbler I found on the sidewalk near Gare Montparnasse that we later released in the gardens of the Bagatelle.

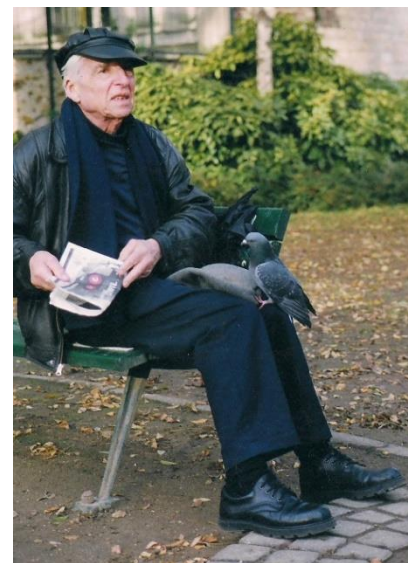
Sheepishly I added “It’s a baby pigeon.” Like many, Henri had been vocal, even demonstrative, in his dislike of them. “Okay” he sighed.



baby Phyllis in his cage, the same “cage” as for us: the whole apartment

If you have never seen a baby pigeon, they are pretty ugly or at least this one was. For some unknown reason, I always anticipate the young birds I acquire to grow up female and I name them appropriately, only they usually turn out to be male as was the case for Phyllis (named for Phyllis Diller). From the start, I planned to let him go at the nearby children’s park; thus, Phyllis was never petted and rarely handled after he started eating on his own. Children can be cruel to pigeons...no sense in encouraging him to be friendly. When he was old enough, I would

grab him, stick him in a carrier bag and take him for “walkies” to the park. There he ran around pretending he was one of the big birds while I protected him from the kicks of little boys. Since he could not yet fly, after an hour I’d scoop him up again and we would return home. This went on for weeks until one day he flew, landing on a low tree branch where he was pleased to remain. Worried about his fate, I returned the next day and called his name. He swooped over from a hidden perch, landed at my feet, and we walked (well, he trotted alongside) to a bench where I discretely slipped him some seeds. Regularly for years, Henri or I would stop by the park, repeating the actions to end at “Phyllis’s bench”. Fourteen years have passed



Henri & Phyllis at Phyllis’ bench

since I found Phyllis in our courtyard. He is no longer present in the park, but you can find him by Henri’s legs in the painting.