

Artist finishes 'Blessing of Animals'

Former El Pasoan Ann James Massey, who now resides in Paris, has returned home for an extended visit with family and friends. Prior to relocating in 1994, Massey was very active in the local El Paso arts community, running a gallery in Santa Teresa, N.M., teaching classes and creating award-winning art. Her oil painting "Days End" garnered the Best of Show award at the 1991 Arts International exhibition sponsored by the El Paso Art Association.

Speaking of awards, just two weeks after her return to El Paso this past month, Massey learned that her newly completed painting, "The Blessing of the Animals," had received the Lawrence von Beidel Memorial Award in the Catherine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club's 121st Annual Open Exhibition held at the National Arts Club in New York City. This highly detailed oil painting, depicting the yearly blessing of the animals on the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi, was first inspired by her personal relationships with a series of furry and feathered friends, she said. Set in Paris' American Cathedral (her spiritual home since her arrival in Paris), the composition is not a reproduction of any specific feast day celebration, she emphasized, but rather a composite of numerous memories.

Giving it an even more personal touch, the figures portrayed, including clergy and even the animals, have an actual physical counterpart — many of whom are members of Massey's extended family. These include her longtime partner, Henri; his sister; Ann's nephews, nieces and cousins; and even Rosie Carlson, wife of local artist Robert Carlson, who is holding a dog patterned on one owned by her collectors and friends, Bob and Rosanne Hoy.

"It took me a year to choose the participants — both human and animals — make sketches, create the composition and then finalize the original drawing on vellum paper," Massey said. "The image is first drawn on the front of the vellum and then retraced on the back. The next step is taping it to the board and the image is then rubbed with a blunt instrument to transfer the drawing onto the board. The drawing as well as the painting is created entirely by hand."

Using other techniques echoing the traditions of the European Masters, Massey is a fine artist in every sense. Complimenting her precise drawings with an equally intricate method of painting, Massey grinds her own paints, using powdered pigments and Maroger black oil. After preparing the mahogany board that serves as her canvas, Massey applies a thin-toned wash as her primary layer. The second step is the creation of a burnt umber value rendition of the entire image. This is followed by three or four more layers of color, with final layers of glazing and scumbling (a technique that allows the lower layers to show through). These layers are separated by a hand-made Flemish Medium, applied when and where each day's work is done. This thin glazing process allows each successive layer to affect the prior layers, producing an effect similar to that of lining up layers of glass panes that allow the light to bounce back from each one.

From start to finish, the painting required



eight years of Massey's creative time. One of the major delays in the highly labor-intensive underpainting and the successive layering of oil was a serious complication that followed what at first seemed like a minor hand injury.

Massey will remain in El Paso through March 26. During that time she will oversee the production and signing of limited edition offset lithographs of "The Blessing of the Animals," due out in early February. Her March plans include giving one or more talks on in her technique and composition based on the Old Masters traditions. Preparatory sketches of the work and the final drawing will be on display, in addition to the original oil painting. More information on dates and times will be found at annjamesmassey.com.



Ann Massey

Doña Ana Arts Council

Kathleen Albers, director of the Doña Ana Arts Council in Las Cruces, has announced a new educational and socially rewarding series.

"Feed Your Mind" is an arts and cultural seminar series featuring knowledgeable speakers on a wide range of topics. These weekly Thursday evening seminars begin Feb. 1 and run through May. The events begin with a social hour and light refreshments from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m., followed by the seminar presentation from 5:30 to 7:00 pm. All presentations take place at the DAAC Arts and Cultural Center, 1740 Avenida de Mercado, Suites B-D.

The first speaker, Kathleen Kay, will give three presentations, Feb 1, 8 and 15, focusing on the "New Mexico Art, Past to Present." The Feb. 15 talk will focus on the Mesilla Valley and current local artists. The next presenter is Bill Key, who will address the topic, "Everything you Want to Know About the Nile, But Were Afraid to Ask" Feb. 22 and March 1. Key lived and worked and traveled in Egypt for over 20 years, traveling throughout the country.

The subscription price for the entire 12 sessions is \$95. Fee for an individual seminar is \$20.

'Sleeping with Lions'

Pat Olchefski-Winston's latest exhibition will open with a reception noon to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 10, at the Om Gallery inside Star City Studio, 120 W. Castellano.

The artwork, which will hang through March 31, was inspired by Pat's trip to Africa in October 2017. After flying from El Paso to Nairobi, Kenya, her adventures began with a five-day safari, encountering wildlife in the Nairobi National Park, the Masa Mara and Serengeti National Park in Tanzania. She spent five additional days at the Old English-styled "Giraffe Manor" just outside Nairobi, a preserve for the endangered Rothschild giraffes.

She had the opportunity to get "up close and personal" with a variety of wild creatures, she said, including the roaring lion that slept just outside her tent for two nights and a cranky old elephant that made it clear that she "did not like Pat's vibrations."

Her interaction with the giraffes was an especially endearing experience. "My second-floor room was on the front of the Manor. Each morning I woke up to seeing the heads of one or two giraffes poking through my open window."

Olchefski-Winston plans to paint at least one and perhaps two images of each of the animals she saw, including lions, cheetahs, hippos, rhinos, Cape buffalo, crocodiles and even owls.

Join Pat and her friends at the Feb. 10 reception, which will include the opportunity to listen to and learn about the technique of African drumming. For more information call 240-5756

Myrna Zanetell is a freelance writer specializing in the visual arts

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