



"Dahlia Shining" is Karol Selvaggio's second painting accepted into Brush Strokes. KAROL SELVAGGIO

'CONSTANTLY LEARNING'

From India ink to watercolors, artist makes a splash at Brush Strokes

Amanda Sieradzki | Council on Culture & Arts

Go deep enough into the archives of any number of major newspapers and you'll uncover the lost art of fashion illustration.

It was a staple in advertising for a number of years before photography became the quick, easy fix for providing pictorial content. It was also the industry where watercolorist Karol Selvaggio got her start.

Every Sunday she collected the New York Times' stylish, upscale advertisements for department stores. After graduating from Florida State University with her degree in fashion illustration, Selvaggio landed her dream job in the art department at Rich's in Atlanta. Four years later she made the switch to becoming the Tallahassee Democrat's first ever art director.

Selvaggio particularly enjoyed illustrating dresses and sportswear and remarks on how the techniques she developed over her career have transferred into her watercolor paintings today. Currently, she serves as the president of the Tallahassee Watercolor Society.

Her work will be exhibited in the new Brush Strokes exhibit, hosted by the Council on Culture & Arts at the city Hall Art Gallery with an opening reception on Thursday.

"They're very similar and it might be why I tend to like watercolor so much," says Selvaggio of the two watercolor styles. "When you



Karol Selvaggio

in Miami before returning to Tallahassee where she finished out her career and retired. She picked up her paintbrush again at the Tallahassee Senior Center where she rediscovered

would create the ads for the newspaper you did it in gray washes by adding water to India ink and getting the different shades of gray. You have to have the same talent to do both."

Selvaggio transitioned from illustration to graphic arts, running her own advertising agency

her passion for watercolors.

As a child Selvaggio always loved having something in her hand be it her crayons or coloring books, and was nominated in high school to paint a mural of "Chaucer's Tales" for the school. She prized watercolor as a medium for its fluidity however, which allowed for a more impressionistic flair and soft colors.

Stylistically, she prefers a traditional, realistic approach to subjects, capturing them with detailed accuracy.

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"Tri-colored heron" won 3rd Award of Excellence in Brush Strokes 2017. KAROL SELVAGGIO



Karol Selvaggio's 1983 fashion illustration for the one-time local store The Carriage shop ran in the Tallahassee Democrat, where Selvaggio was the first art director. KAROL SELVAGGIO



Fashion illustration for ad in 1965 Tallahassee Democrat. KAROL SELVAGGIO



"Diamonds in the Sea" won 2nd Award of Excellence in the 2016 Brush Strokes. KAROL SELVAGGIO

Painting

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"I paint from photographs," says Selvaggio. "Whenever I see anything I might be interested in, I photograph it. I may only use part of a photograph or a couple of photographs to come up with a layout for my painting, and from there you look at your darks and lights and decide on what palette you're going to use."

Watching others paint gives Selvaggio ideas on how to compose her paintings as she keeps a keen eye out for the contrast of blacks and whites. She'll page through watercolor books and videos to bolster her technique and has taken several workshops through TaWS.

In her home studio, the windows bring in sunlight from the north, which is said to be the best lighting for painting. It takes her anywhere from three weeks to a few months to finish a piece, and she will often rotate between two to three as the mood strikes her. At the moment she's focusing on a painting of bleeding hearts flowers — a white heart-shaped blossom with a red

flower bursting out from its center. The white isn't truly white however once she gets to mixing the pinks, purples, and blues that comprise it.

"You're always searching for subjects and looking for something unusual," says Selvaggio.

Her paintings appear illuminated from the inside out. Selvaggio says she enjoys working with transparent colors that allow the hues underneath to shine through. Sometimes she'll paint a piece three times before achieving the desired effect. When it comes to color, Selvaggio says it's a learning process as the watercolorist can either mix colors or choose from a premade palette, but one must always work from light to dark.

Though she took watercolor classes in college, she has found the teaching and guidance at the senior center invaluable and credits them with many of her light bulb moments.

"It's a wonderful learning place, and you're constantly learning," says Selvaggio. "I don't care how long you've been painting there's always something out there that you can learn."

As an artist, she is most proud of her works "Diamonds in the Sea"

and "Tri-Colored Heron." The first depicts a lighthouse along the splashy blue Italian coast that went on to win a 2nd place Award of Excellence in Brush Strokes 2016. The second is of an eye-catching heron nestled in green foliage that earned her a 3rd place Award of Excellence in Brush Strokes 2017.

This year's Brush Strokes exhibit will have its opening reception on Thursday, Selvaggio is most impressed with the strength in the entries she's seen, and as TaWS president, is determined to grow and push the organization forward in the community. Ultimately, she is hopeful that those who attend will be blown away by the community's watercolor abilities.

"It's like a little gem that not a lot of people know about," remarks Selvaggio. "I think (people) are going to go away with a sense that there's talent here that they didn't realize, asking 'how did they do that?' and having a hunger or yearning to see more."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).

If you go

What: Tallahassee Watercolor Society Brush Strokes 2018

When: Opening Reception 6-7:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 30, exhibit runs through Oct. 8

Where: City Hall Art Gallery, 300 S Adams St

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information, visit <https://tallahassee-watercolor-society.com/>.