

Art Introduction

Island artists inspire students to create original works

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHARON YANISH



WHAT STARTED MORE THAN 40 years ago, the Marco Island Center for the Arts today is the hub of Island creativity. With 44 instructors teaching more than 140 classes, there is sure to be something to intrigue the artist in everyone. From oil, acrylic and watercolor classes, instruction on jewelry making, basket weaving, literary pursuits and much more, our Art League strives to enrich lives and inspire creativity. Here is just a snapshot of artists who will be offering instruction on their medium this season.

Soul Food

You could say that Sheri Chase's venture into the art world was meant to be.

On the same day from three different people, she received art-inspired gifts including six boxes of beads, enrollment in an enamel class and some inherited books and jewelry-making tools from the 1920s. "The minute I picked up a tool, I knew this is what I'm supposed to do," said Chase, of pursuing her artistic talent.

Her great love is jewelry making, but when she began volunteering at NCH Arts in Healing program she found another way to express herself. Chase took over an existing scarf painting class to help stroke patients regain skills, and something called to the artist inside her. "I loved it so much I started doing it on my own."

She's brought her talent to a one-day

class where students complete two hand-painted silk scarves. The process begins with stretching the piece of silk on a frame. After sketching the outline of the design with a dissolvable solution, the students use fabric dye to add color. Once the dye is dry, a spray with a chemical fixative sets the color and makes the outlines disappear. A quick rinse in the sink and the scarf is hung to dry. No art experience is necessary and due to the ethereal nature, every silk scarf turns out beautifully.

Chase is a believer that everyone needs a tool to get their feelings out. "You have to build your story and tell your story," she said and finding a medium that works well for each individual is



top: Sheri Chase holds one of her silk scarves. Her work is for sale at the gift shop.

left: Instructor Sheri Chase helps student Linda Kropp during the silk scarf painting class.

above: Tara O'Neill puts finishing touches on a charcoal drawing. Using an easel or slanted drawing board gives the artist a true perspective of the subject.

the key. Emotion and energy need to be expressed, and jewelry design and silk scarf painting is her way of doing that. “It feeds my soul.”

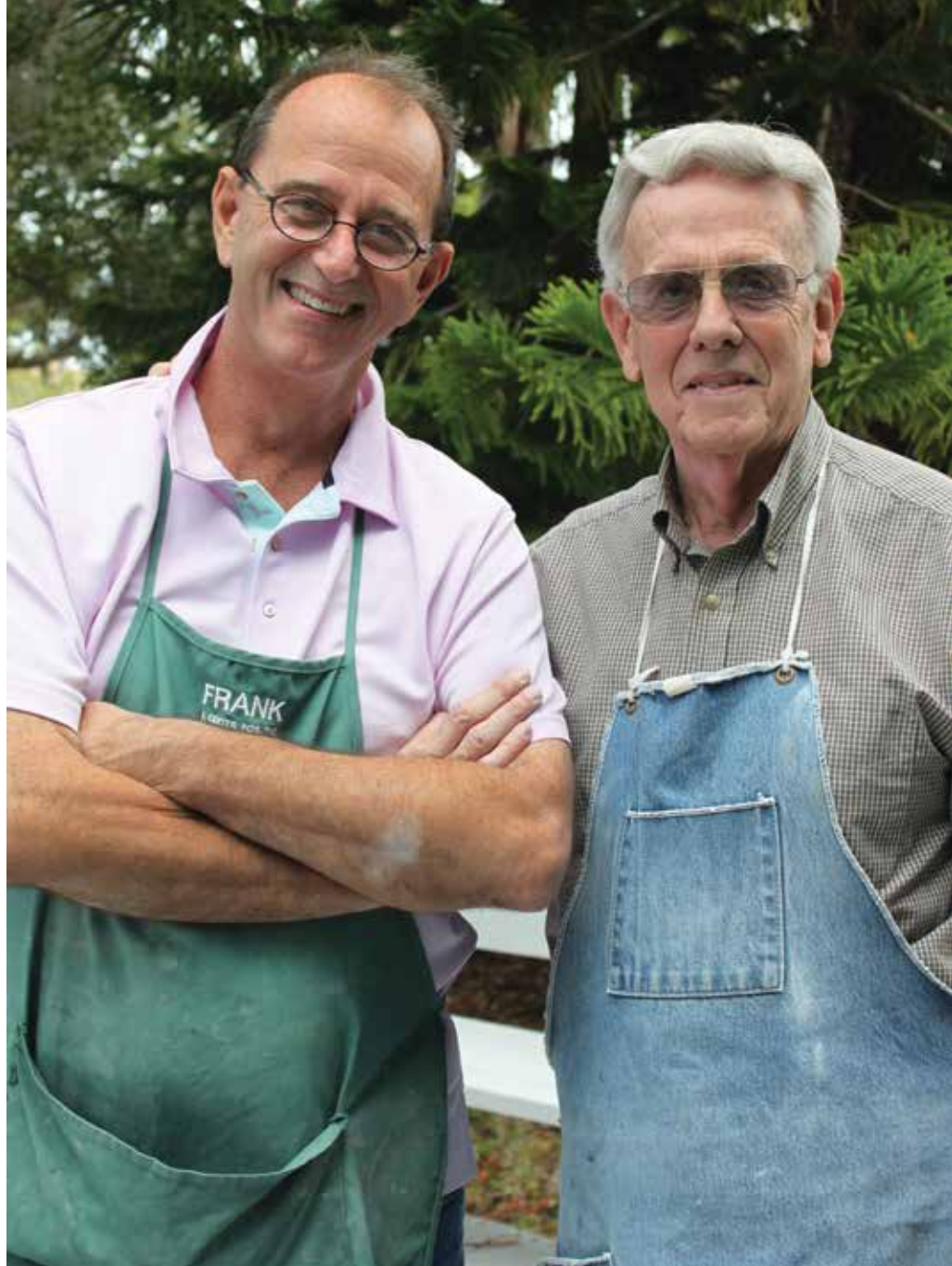
Island Inspiration

Tara O’Neill can’t remember a time when she wasn’t drawing. Her tropical art graces many Island homes and now this Florida transplant is taking her talent a step further — she’s teaching others how to indulge their own creative side. Her classes, Drawing the Fundamentals, include a slide presentation, discussions and, of course, plenty of practice.

O’Neill is convinced that beginning with a basic drawing class is the way to develop a foundation of knowledge that one can build on. “Trying to paint without first learning how to draw is like writing with no vocabulary,” she said, since drawing forms the basic structure of any image. And to those who have never attempted drawing and wonder if they must have natural talent to even try, O’Neill said, “It’s a matter of love, not talent,” and she welcomes beginners as well as experienced artists who want to brush up on basics.

Her work can be seen and purchased at The Blue Mangrove Gallery on Marco Island, and also at the annual art show, “Five Painters and a Potter” sponsored by The Clay Place in Naples in March. Her one-woman exhibition will be held in April, May and June at the Marco Island Historical Museum.

Her artwork reflects her home and the scenery and wildlife that she loves, inspir-



Frank de la Roche and Joe Cooper, stone sculpture instructors at the Center for the Arts.

ing her every day. “Beautiful skies, lush mangroves, docks, marinas and flowers as big as your head,” she said. “I would never have to leave this Island. I’m surrounded by inspiration.”

Use Your Hands

“Please touch” is a phrase used often by Frank de la Roche and Joe Cooper. The two men believe that touching is what sculpture is all about. It’s tactile, said Cooper of the texture and polish of stone. “The pieces asked to be touched.”

The two men have been teaching together

for 16 years since meeting in Naples, and not only are their teaching styles the same, but the look of their finished work is similar. “If you saw our work in the same room, you wouldn’t know who did which,” said de la Roche. “We are totally in sync.”

At the start of class they ask students to select a rough chunk of stone based on what it reminds them of and try to imagine what they could fashion from it. Soapstone, alabaster, black chlorite

UPCOMING CLASSES

STONE SCULPTURE

Feb. 18, 25, March 4, 11, 18
(5 sessions 9 a.m.-noon and 1-4 p.m.)
March 25, April 1, 8, 15, 22
(5 sessions 9 a.m.-noon and 1-4 p.m.)
Members \$156/nonmembers \$195

PAINTED SILK SCARVES

Feb. 26 (1 session 10 a.m.-3 p.m.)
April 19 (1 session 10 a.m.-3 p.m.)
May 13 (1 session 10 a.m.-3 p.m.)
Members \$132/nonmembers \$165

DRAWING THE FUNDAMENTALS

March 4, 11, 18, 25
(4 sessions 10 a.m.-noon)
April 1, 8, 15, 22
(4 sessions 10 a.m.-noon)
Members \$132/nonmembers \$165

PENNSYLVANIA DUTCH PAPER CUTTING

May 1, 8, 15, 22
(4 sessions 1-4 p.m.)
Members \$140/nonmembers \$175

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and African wonderstone are among the choices to inspire them. "Some work from a sketch or clay model, or the shape of the stone suggests what they might do," said Cooper of his students' inspiration.

Then students get to work roughing it out with hammer and chisel. "It's a subtracted exercise," said de la Roche, explaining that unlike clay sculpture where you add dimensions, in stone sculpting the technique is to take material away to form an image. Rasping, filing and sanding are next,



then buffing with oil and final coat of wax.

No experience is necessary to take the class and students work at different paces, giving everyone a chance to view all stages of the process. If someone is curious as to what the class is like before registering, the teachers welcome visitors to drop by and take a look, and of course, they are welcome to touch.

The Art of Scherenschnitte

The art of papercutting began in Asia, but spread throughout the world with each country adapting the process to their own customs. "The Pennsylvania Dutch brought fame to papercutting in the U.S.," said artist Mia Mazza. "Traditionally it was used as a way to create mementos," like birth announcements or holiday cards. Many ornate picture designs are cut from a single piece of paper and framed.

Mazza has been studying art since she was 12 and holds a bachelor's degree in fine art from State University of New York. "I'm an acrylic wildlife artist," she said, "but wanted to do something traditional that was from the people." When she came upon a book by a paper-cut artist, Mazza was fascinated by the delicate

Stone sculpting class at the Center for the Arts.

folk art and decided to try her hand at it. Today she teaches on the subject and sells her framed, finished work.

One advantage of papercutting is that people of any age can learn. It can be as simple or intricate as the student desires and the design can be traced or drawn by hand. She teaches Scherenschnitte (German for "scissors cut") in the Dutch manner in her classes and usually starts out with a snowflake for practice. She laughs when she remembers teaching a class of adults in Florida who had never seen a snowflake, much less made one.

Supplies are simple, consisting of a small pair of scissors, Exacto knife, craft mat and tracing paper. Plain white typing paper, wrapping or scrapbooking paper are used to make the design, then carefully glued to a contrasting background. Once the students learn the technique, the uses are endless and creative.

"The art of doing things by hand is almost gone because of computers," said Mazza, "and a click of the mouse makes it so easy. But when the brain is engaged with the hand," she said, "it's called play." ■