

Making Art

For decades, Lanore Corbin Cady has lived life as her own person - and her art shows it...

Her Way



By Michael Johnson
Free Press Editor

SCOTLAND - There is Rembrandt, but his work is stuffy and staid. There is Picasso, but one needs to be on psychotropic drugs to really understand his art. Then, there is Lanore Corbin Cady - closer to DaVinci, but with her own twist.

Ahead of her time with genius-level intelligence, Lanore recently celebrated her 85th birthday with a special party and massive gallery showing of decades of her artwork - everything from early watercolors of California's historic Victorian homes to heart-felt poems calligraphed into her works.

If there was a female version of a Renaissance man, Lanore is it. Although she is showing some signs of her 85 years - including a mind which sometimes slips - the well-traveled Scotland native's eyes sparkle with enthusiasm as she talks about her art and a lifetime of doing things her way.

Walking through her studio in downtown Scotland, one gets not only a sense of art history, but a glimpse of the woman, herself.

As her oldest son, Bill, strolls through the gallery, he describes his mother's styles and chronologizes her artistic career.

The standard - if one dare use that word to describe anything Lanore does - watercolors of the old home place and local attractions are on the walls. But then the styles go in wholly different directions.

Bill points to one painting in particular - of a dilapidated

Victorian-style home in California.

It's kind of an eerie watercolor of a once-stately mansion soon to fall victim to the wrecking ball.

"She started the save the Victorian movement in California," he says. "People would see these magnificent paintings and ask 'Where is this house?' Well, it's gone."

Bill went on to say that his mother would sometimes literally be sketching the homes while they were being torn down.

"Sometimes, she would grab me by the hand and we'd go, just ahead of the wrecking ball," he says. "That's what started the whole movement."

Her art then evolves to paintings of local scenes from her California days - only this time, she has included calligraphy of poems describing the scenes.

One, nice - but ordinary - home is shown with a large fallen tree in the entryway - along with a poem that tells of visitor's travails in getting to the house. The story goes that one might be able to make it up to the house in a Model T if they are skilled and lucky enough to not have to downshift in the middle of the steep, rutted hill out front.

His Shouts

Ricoched

Off the trees as he prayed,

Gripping the wheel, throttle, nerves to ally

The gears he'd not lowered on the 'Model T' Ford to make Mitchell Hill Road 'on high'

"She paints the scene and then tells you about it," says Bill, reading one of his mother's poem with abandon and a little

Staff photo by M. Johnson
Lanore Corbin Cady enjoys a smile inside her Brick Star Studio in Scotland. Many local artists have come into their own with the guidance of Ms. Cady, as she is affectionately known in Greene County and beyond. The prolific artist and teacher recently celebrated her 85th birthday with a special picnic and gallery showing at the Brick Star.

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Lanore Corbin Cady celebrates life and art

FROM COVER

bit of a son's pride.

What Bill says is amazing about the poems inside the paintings is that Lanore's process involved completely finishing the painting - a sometimes months-long process - then inking the calligraphy.

"That's permanent India Ink," he smiles.

"There is no erasing it or scraping it off. One mistake and the whole thing is gone."

Another style of painting that Lanore began to use in the 1960 and '70s was a "wash." This involves simply painting the entire medium with muted and faded colors of watercolors - and then deciding what one wants it to become.

"She might do the wash and then ponder on it for six months," says Bill, pointing at one ocean blue painting. "Then it becomes sheep."

"I like the sheep," smiles Lanore, recalling a scene several decades earlier. "They were so nice and friendly."

While others might be content simply sticking with their poems and/or watercolors, Lanore decided to expand her repertoire in the early 1980s to include Chinese calligraphy. She became so adept at the ancient art; she was able to even fool an expert at one time.

Bill tells of how his mother's Chinese calligraphy was once shown to an expert in California who unendingly praised its perfection.

"He said, 'Who is this master? I have to meet him,'" chuckles Bill. "He absolutely did not believe it was a Caucasian woman who did it."

Bill explains that in the ancient, as well as modern Chinese arts, a select few are trained for decades in the art of Chinese calligraphy.

"When we were kids, we would always ask Mom what she was reading now," he says. "Well, this time it was books on Chinese calligraphy - and it was good."

The woman who could have literally made a fortune with her artwork chose instead to make a comfortable living and do it her way.

"She never liked agents," Bill says. "She was never part of the main-stream art community."

Lanore chimes in, giving her two cents-worth, "I paint for me, not for them."

She explains that had she become a commer-



Staff photo by M. Johnson

Lanore Corbin Cady looks over her work titled "Mirror" and recited the poem about the image staring back at her at the Brick Star Studio in Scotland.

cial artist, she would be forced into a particular mold of what the agents and critics thought would sell.

She proved them all wrong with an exhibit at the Sovereign Gallery in California's Napa Valley, when her work brought in more money than any other showing in the gallery's history.

"I was hanging paintings in the gallery and I'm trying to set everything up when someone came up and asked me how much this set of paintings would be," he smiles. "I told him I didn't know, but it would be a lot. So he gave me a blank check."

Visibly taken aback, Bill says he later found out that the man was the owner of a large lumber company in Eureka, Calif., and had been a fan of his mother's for years.

"And he wanted that painting, no matter what the cost."

It's that kind of respect and influence which kept Lanore going - even after moving back to Scotland a couple of decades ago.

Bill also tells the story of one of Lanore's college students in California who seemingly had no artistic talent and was simply looking for an easy art class to round out his major.

"That man is now the president of Pixar," he winks. "And he credits Mom."

One of the largest pieces in the exhibition is an introspective piece she painted and lettered celebrating her 70th birthday.

It's titled "Mirror" and looks at life from the mirror's perspective as one ages. A two-piece work, the wall-size hanging strikes a cord with anyone who has gotten - or is getting a little older.

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Introspective art shadows what is to come

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*Can you be me? That's strange,
I had me pictured somewhat; ah-umm
taller, well-I, leaner - younger, see?
You can't be me; your hair is grey - and thin!
Hey! Only yesterday they told me I had
hair of auburn-gold that glistened in the sun.
But you, you're old!
Your skin hangs, pleated, on a shrunken frame;
your eyes look, fuzzy, through their faded lens.
Why! Just the other day my sweetheart told me
I had velvet skin and eyes a million stars lived in
so how can you believe we're one when
you've grown old while - I've stayed young!
My mirror-image rolled her eyes above her
specks.
I knew right then she had me cold.
"Seek things," she said, "- and you will come to
know
those things you seek are merely an illusion.
Seek that which is within and you will find
whatever was begun is never left behind;
it's here, forever real, and must become
a fusion with all else that's ONE!"
I thought about that - quite awhile -
then smiled to realize it's truly fun
to be a part of ALL THAT'S ONE!
And so I said to me - or to my mirror self,
"OK, ol' Honey-bun, I won't object;
just don't go soaring off to other worlds
before you check with me
because I'm not exactly through
with Earthly dreams,
at least those I must yet pursue,
so let me promise you:
As long as there is work for me to finish
here beneath this sun, I'll stay;
but, when I see that all the livin'
that-I-had-a-lot-of-yet-to-do
is done,
only then will I give in
and fade away*

One of the most poignant pieces in the collection is titled "He Brought Me Roses." Perhaps it was her way of acknowledging the fact that she one day might face what she currently faces - the daily struggle with on-setting Alzheimer's dis-

ease. Another one of her works is a poem about roses, which also deals with the often-debilitating affliction.

Bill explains that his maternal grandmother - Veva - suffered from the disease, and used to continually repeat the fact that her husband used to bring her roses.

Lanore made that into an impactful, thought-provoking work.

"I remember her saying that 'Luther used to bring me roses,'" says Bill, now a little quieter and less gregarious. "And this is what Mom made out of it."

Although she does suffer with the disease which sometimes makes even the simplest tasks - like signing one of her books - into a major undertaking, she muddles through.

"Dr [Owen] Batterton told us the medicine will never make it better," says Bill. "It could slow it down, perhaps. But what really helps is love, attention and activity."

Though she sometimes stumbles on her words and has a hard time reciting the poems which used to roll off her tongue like a cool summer breeze, she is still as fit as ever.

"Last year, she fell," laughs Bill. "We were playing Frisbee in the yard and she drug her foot across a gopher mound. She took a header and we all were horrified."

He laughs when noting that he had thoughts that had she injured herself, people would think she fell getting out of the tub or some other "old person" mishap.

"Nope, we were playing Frisbee - and she was 84," he chuckles, which turns into a true belly laugh.

But he becomes more serious when he speaks about being a caregiver of an Alzheimer patient.

He recalls being a young child and having only two major fears - both of which came to him in dreams.

The first is the common claustrophobia - the fear being confined. But the second is more unusual and more personal.

He tells of a dream in which he is walking down a bright, wooded country road - much like the winding Scotland Hill. When he reaches a

certain point, he sees a rope stretched across his path.

"When I reached out for it, there was a knot, so I untied it," he says, a glimmer of fear in his eyes. "Then there was another knot and pretty soon, I was tangled up in the rope and the sun was starting to set."

He says those once-beautiful tress were now menacing in his dream - as he became more and more entangled.

He equates that to a feeling he sometimes gets while dealing with the day-to-day stresses and strains of a caregiver.

"Since I help her so much, I have to know where things are," he says. "And she'll follow me just as I'm sorting things and start moving them. It's her work ethic which drives her to do 'something.' Here come those knots again."

But he credit's Lanore's longevity and her continuing good health and mental acuity partly with the fact that she lives in Scotland.

"Scotland has taken very good care of her," he smiles with local pride. "They have really watched out for her and taken care of her."

Literally seconds before Bill makes this revelation, two young girls see Lanore walking near the Cady Park and immediately stop to chat with "Miss Cady."

Bill describes this as a typical scene in the small village of little more than 100 people.

That's also the reason Lanore gives for coming back home - after traveling the world - to finally stay in Scotland.

"There was never any doubt that she would come back here," says Bill. "And she did."

"This is where I am and this is where I want to be," Lanore smiles, her eyes shining.

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Staff photo by
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**Bill Cady,
Lanore's
oldest son,
shares a laugh
with her at the
Brick Star
Studio in
Scotland
recently.**