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Art Beyond the Classroom

A Teacher's Love for Art Inspires Her Students

by Nicola Burnell



Bernadette at an exhibition of her students' artwork

Bernadette Waystack showed promise as an artist in second grade, winning the "Saint Luke Award" at an art exhibit at Boston College.

Twelve years in a Boston Catholic school, however, did not nurture her talents. "I went dormant," says the Harwich art teacher. "When I compare my middle school years to what my students have, I can't help wondering how differently my own art path might have been."

With a B.F.A. from UMASS Amherst, Bernadette dedicated her career to teaching art. An advocate for arts education, she appreciates the fact that Harwich students are required to take visual arts from Kindergarten through eighth grade.

"I tell my students that they need to know what an important place they have in the history of modern art. Many of them don't realize what the legacy of art on the Cape truly is. It's their birthright as citizens of this place."

In 2008, the teacher became a student again when she embarked upon a Masters program at Savannah College of Art & Design (SCAD). "I received a Masters in painting, carrying courses online while teaching full time, and spending three summers in Savannah doing my studio work."

Bernadette's passion for the arts has spilled into her classroom. For the past seven years, with support from the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod, Massachusetts Cultural Council, Harwich Cultural Council and Cape Cod 5, she has collaborated with Chris McCarthy and Lynn Stanley at PAAM to bring her entire crew of eighth graders to the Provincetown museum to experience hands-on art and direct meetings with contemporary working artists.

With a background in quilts and pastels, Bernadette had fun interpreting a Fritz Bultman's collage in fabric for PAAM's Student and Educator Curating Program.



Night Enters the Water interpretation

The original, Night Enters the Water, which is part of PAAM's collection, is one of a group of pieces they selected for this year's exhibit," she explains. "I had my students in 5th, 6th and 7th Grade do interpretations of pieces of their choice and 3 of them plus mine will be in the 20th Anniversary Exhibition. I am constantly amazed each year at the superb work they produce. They are deeply invested in what they do because they choose it and it's phenomenal."



Morning Marshlight, pastel

Primarily a landscape artist, Bernadette is especially drawn to the tidal marshes and wide open spaces near the coast. While she used to work exclusively in pastel, her recent work shows a shift in perspective and medium.

"I am deeply influenced by the rituals, traditions and culture of my Catholic upbringing and still have a strong faith and spirituality that deeply impacts my work. I studied Italian Renaissance art heavily in college and these connections have re-emerged strongly in my newer work since SCAD.



Noontime Haze, oil on panel with acrylic

She now works predominantly in oil on panels that she builds herself. "I translate the contemporary landscape into icons that reference ecclesiastical art, as in Noontime Haze. In this way I co-create with and pay homage to the Divine in relationship with nature and humanity."



The Labyrinth Walk, oil on panel with acrylic

Some of her larger panels refer back to the Renaissance style of "tondo", circles in a square, that symbolize the Divine (circle) and square (man), as seen in The Labyrinth Walk.

Bernadette finds inspiration in the landscape works of Philip Koch and Ross Moffett, who is part of the legacy of the Provincetown Art Colony. A self-taught student of the Colony's history, she developed a curriculum for her eighth graders that honors the artistic ties that go back generations. "I love the fact that I am still able to walk around and be where Hawthorne, Lazzell and Motherwell were, and do what they did."

Even though she is not a figurative artist, Selina Trieff and Heather Blume have both had an impact on her as a contemporary artist. "Heather, having been there before me, gave me some great support and encouragement when I was struggling to get through graduate school. I've enjoyed workshops with her and she's also been greatly supportive of my program with my eighth graders."



The Student & Educator Curating Program Anniversary Exhibition at Provincetown Art Association and Museum

June 20 - July 8
Opening Reception
Wednesday, June 20, 7-9 PM

Featuring the work of students and teachers from the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School, Chatham Elementary, Eastham Elementary, Eddy Elementary, Harwich Middle and High Schools, Nauset Middle and High Schools and Provincetown Schools

This exhibition is supported in part by the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod.

www.paam.org

She admires the untraditional path followed by Selina, who came of age in the 40's and 50's. "I've been privileged to visit with her a few times at her home and hear some great stories."

Bernadette believes that giving on the Cape is the lifeblood for her work. As the artist liaison for the Habitat for Humanity fundraiser "You've Got Mail", she uses her art as a vehicle to advance and support such local causes. "Giving to others always ends up bringing back blessings tenfold," she notes.

Bernadette will be spending her summer both as an artist and a student in Provincetown. The recipient of a scholarship to the Fine Arts Work Center, in July, she will be studying "The Hofmann Approach" with Robert Henry and Selina Trieff, two of Hans Hofmann's students.

From June 22 through July 5, she'll be featured in a two-person show at Larkin Gallery, where she is represented. She also has pieces in two separate shows at PAAM; the annual 12 x 12 Auction and the 20th Anniversary Student and Educator Curating Program exhibition.

"I expect I'll always be a teacher and a student in some manner," says Bernadette, who currently co-directs retreats at Evensong Retreat Center, in Harwich Port. "Combining art and spirituality is one of the most rewarding experiences."

Perhaps her most rewarding experience, however, is becoming a grandmother. "My daughter is due to have a little girl of her own near the end of June," she enthuses. "Another generation to pass the love for Cape Cod's artistic history along to!"

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Nicola Burnell is the Publisher and a contributing writer for this magazine. In addition to writing her own novel, she teaches novel writing classes through Nauset Community Education. As part of the Cape Women in the Community initiative, she also teaches a series of creativity development classes, including the Artist's Way, and several writing classes at Danton Studio and the Hyannis Arts Center at Guyer Barn. For details about these classes visit this [CWO Classes link](#).

Nicola has been a Reiki practitioner and Personal Empowerment workshop leader for over fifteen years. She is a member in Letters of the [National League of American Pen Women](#) and is Historian of the Cape Cod Branch.

Nicola is now offering a variety of FUN Events and Writing Retreats on Cape Cod. She will be offering Writing and Artist Retreats at [Casa della Quercia](#), an historic villa in Northern Tuscany, in the Spring of 2013.

For details about any of her Classes or Events email Nicola@CapeWomenOnline.com.

You can also follow her blog "[Nic's Novel Project](#)" and on [Twitter](#).

Nicola lives in Harwich with her two sons and several pets.