

Addison Art Gallery, Orleans

BY GILLIAN DRAKE

The Addison Art Gallery in Orleans recently celebrated its 10th anniversary and in that relatively short period of time, it has become the art gallery of choice for a large number of collectors, as well as the home of some of the most sought-after artists on Cape Cod. The power-house behind the gallery is Helen Addison, a creative and energetic woman whose vision of how an art gallery can and should operate came to be realized over the past decade.

Helen and I have a professional relationship that goes back nearly 25 years, to the time when I owned a printing business in Provincetown and she was the advertising manager for the local newspaper. Recently, we laughed about the fact

that neither of us thought we would become so involved in the art world. But art had always been part of our lives, and it turned out to be a seductive siren call that lured us away from the traditional business world, urging us to pursue a life guided more by aesthetics and emotions rather than balance sheets and budgets.

Here, Helen discusses her gallery and the artists and collectors that are its heart and soul.

Top right: Domico Boreffi and Helen Addison in the gallery.

Left: Joyce Johnson, "Water's Edge"
Below: Elizabeth Pratt, "The Big Tree"



Helen Addison grew up in a home full of art, and made her first tour of European museums while she was still in kindergarten. So when she moved to Cape Cod, after completing her MBA at Cornell, and started to work in Provincetown, she was naturally drawn to the art that is abundant in that community—in galleries, in artist's studios, and even on the walls of Town Hall when you go to pay your taxes.

She worked in Provincetown in the late 1970s after she had finished graduate school to work for the local paper, the Provincetown Advocate, and later opened her own advertising agency. "When I left the Advocate, people asked me to do their ads and PR for them, and the idea for an advertising agency evolved," she explained. "I opened Addison & Associates in Provincetown and moved it to Orleans in 1985."

The seed for the idea of an art gallery was planted early. During this time, she served as the marketing consultant for several arts organizations, including the Provincetown Art Association & Museum and the Cape Cod School of Art and she knew a lot of artists. "While basically happy with their galleries, many artists complained about the lack of marketing support, so that put the idea in my head," she explains. "Also, around that time, I remember hearing about two women, Sally Nerber and Lizzie Upham, who had opened a gallery in Wellfleet, and I thought, what a wonderful thing to do! Later, when I bought this building in Orleans for my advertising agency, I had no idea that one day I'd have an art gallery here!"

She opened the gallery in 1996, and was running both businesses for a while. But then she decided to downsize the agency because at that point all she was doing it was managing it and she wanted to do something more creative. She started out with artists she knew, and then others approached her. "Many artists from the early days are still with me—Garry Gilmartin, Elizabeth Pratt, Joyce Johnson, Charles Sovek, Amy Sanders, and Steve Allrich," she says.

Helen feels that her marketing background has been very helpful in understanding the art business, but admits, "Of course, marketing knowledge can be applied to any business."

She has a distinct view of her mission as a gallery owner: "Our job





Clockwise from top left: Kim Kettler, "On The Green Table"
 JoAnn Ritter, "Sea Captain's View"
 Charles Sovek, "Watermelon"
 Logan Hagege, "Clear Skies"

is to move work from the studio to the home or office where it will be appreciated. But I certainly didn't go into the gallery business to make money! I never thought when I was studying for my MBA that I'd be able to live on Cape Cod and support myself by running a business. But here I am, doing what I love. I love the people I meet—the collectors are a wonderful group of people. And being surrounded by art all day while you are working is wonderful."

The gallery, a classic half-Cape full of natural light, has a comfortable atmosphere, more like a private home than a gallery. There is a sculpture garden in front, cathedral ceilings in the upstairs gallery to display more contemporary art, and a fireplace so people can see what a painting would look like over a mantle. The gallery is an inviting place to visit and all are welcome, including small children. She also believes in encouraging children to look at art. "We always have crayons and toys for kids here—it makes them feel comfortable in an art gallery. It's educational for them, and a lot of parents actually ask their children their opinion when they buy a piece."

Helen mentions her gallery director, Domonic Boreffi, and says, "I find true joy in working with him. He has a wonderful way with people. He is absolutely fabulous."

Domonic describes working at Addison Art Gallery as "a great experience for me. Professionally speaking, it has given me a sense of place that I did not find in the corporate gallery I worked for in California. I've been able to develop real relationships with our artists and clients. Working with Helen is such a pleasure and so valuable, something that I will

always carry with me."

After he left California, he became a docent at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. "It was such a lucky opportunity for me. I had just moved back to the East Coast, and the day I arrived I heard about a first-time museum teacher program. I gave group tours, talking about art and Mrs. Gardner's diverse collection. Without a doubt, it is my favorite museum."

When asked how they choose artists for the gallery, Domonic explains, "There is something organic that happens in selecting new artists for the gallery. We choose artists based on strong work that speaks to us and will speak to our collectors. We are drawn to artists that offer a fresh point of view. We look for professionalism. Our most successful artists understand how the business of art co-exists with the creation of art."

And Helen adds, "We have to like the work, and know that our collectors will have an affinity for it. We like to deal with artists who understand what we are doing. Perhaps most important, we have to personally like them to take them on. So it's a special relationship that we have. Hundreds of artists try to get into the gallery every year, so we choose people we know we can enjoy, people who we can be genuinely excited about when their work sells. They have to be professional, and they have to be



able to give us a supply of good work. And we strive to forge cohesive relationships between our artists and collectors."

Helen believes in nurturing this relationship, and to that end keeps the gallery open all year, with a full schedule of art openings and events throughout the year. "We often have as many as twelve artists at our openings for group shows, and many of our artists will come to each other's art show openings. Openings are where collectors and artists mingle. The relationship between the collector and the work is intensified when the artist and collector know each other."

The gallery's artists attest to these views; as sculptor Joyce Johnson says, "Addison Art Gallery is one of the few galleries open year-round on the Outer Cape, a definite advantage for continuity in representing artists' work." Watercolorist Elizabeth Pratt has been involved with a great many galleries over her

50-year career, and has found Addison Art to be the most professional. "Helen works hard to promote her artists in every way possible. She is fair and considerate, a very compassionate person," she says, adding, "Domonic's knowledge of art adds greatly to his ability to serve customers. Addison Art will be my last gallery representation and I find it very satisfying to be ending my career with them, the best for last!"

Pharr Schulenburg, who has been with the gallery for four years, agrees: "Addison is a proactive, hard working gallery. It has a wonderful intimate atmosphere and everyone who walks through the door is welcomed in a professional yet friendly manner. Domonic, the Gallery Director, is incredibly personable, working equally well with the public and the artists. The shows are well planned and well hung, and the artists are encouraged to keep new work coming in the door throughout the year so there is always something new to see."

Joining the Addison Art Gallery has been especially meaningful for landscape painter Peter Kalill, who says, "The Addison Art Gallery is not just a gallery of talented and nationally-recognized artists. It was the catalyst in my art career when Helen Addison took me on as an unknown 29-year-old painter. While other galleries seem to only look for established artists, Helen has taken risks and propelled



From top:
Mary Moquin, "Seeking Peace"
Pharr Schulenburg, "Warm Shoulders"
Vera Champlin, "Courtship"
Peter Kalill, "The Last of Summer"
Elizabeth Pratt, "Flaming Fins"

emerging artists into the national art scene.”

One of Addison’s collectors, Cynthia Mohr, says, “As a collector of art, I have always loved the hunt. To walk through a gallery, viewing the works on exhibit, then having that rare experience of finding a painting that moves me by ‘speaking to my soul,’ is such a thrill. Since discovering the Addison Art Gallery two years ago, I’ve had the good fortune to find many special paintings . . . works that have enriched my life not only by giving some lively punch or a bit of serenity to my rooms, but by allowing me to view my world from another far more interesting perspective.”

Henry and Stacia Talberth agree: “Much to our delight, we discovered Addison Art Gallery in Orleans many years ago. The variety of artists that are represented at the gallery continue to keep us coming back for more! Helen has a talent for selecting talented new artists to mix with those who have become established names in the Cape art community. We especially look forward to the art openings held at the gallery that allow us to get to know the artists on a personal level.”

And collector Lisa Atkin has the last word: “Beautiful art, great people, wonderful space—it’s so rare to find everything in one place. Even though I live in Boston, Addison Art Gallery is easily counted as one of my favorite destinations to view art. As soon as I walk through the door, I feel like I’m home. And that’s due to Helen and Domonic’s ability to create an environment that is at once art-friendly and people-friendly. I feel very fortunate to have found a place that gets it so right.” ▲

• Gillian Drake is the editor and publisher of this magazine.



Laura Griffith, “Belles”



John Murphy
“Waiting for Eugene”