

Elizabeth Pratt

APPROACHES TO WATERCOLOR

Cape Cod Museum of Art, Dennis

July 12 to September 7

Museum Reception for all current shows on

Friday, August 1 from 5:30 to 7:30

Private reception for Elizabeth Pratt on Friday, July 18,
5:30 to 7:30, RSVP to helen@addisonart.com

A FULL-TIME ARTIST with a spontaneous and lyrical style, Elizabeth Pratt keeps her work continually fresh and alive in a range of subject matter treated with new techniques. Now 80 years old, she has worked primarily with watercolors for over 60 years, saying, "Since my early training, watercolor has challenged and excited me. My aim has never been to become more proficient in realism but rather to explore the limits of watercolor's possibilities. I strive to let the paints' characteristics rule, the drips, bleeds and blooms be apparent for visual enjoyment. When I put water to the paper, I don't know what it's going to do. It just goes, and some miracle happens."

The invention of hot press papers in the 1960s expanded the medium's ability to achieve amazing textures. "The paint stays on the surface and can be manipulated with various tools as well as with brushes," explains Pratt. "Color vibrancy, abstract shapes, tactile representations and lighting extremes are enhanced without a preset plan. I let the medium lead me."

The works evolve on the paper through a combination of "accidents" guided by her vivid imagination. "Landscapes begin as abstracts and the nature I know emerges. If painterly effects appear in jeopardy, I stop and leave the essence," she says. "These methods have been transmitted in all my teaching. I stress how to

see differently, how to cherish what is developing on the page, how to push it to the utmost."

Robert Vickrey has said, "Ever since I first saw Elizabeth Pratt flipping pieces of celluloid back and forth through the wet paint I've been fascinated by her work."

Even after having completed more than 2,000 watercolors, she still feels the rush of excitement when the first colors go down, "flowing freely, uncontrolled, meandering in a way more beautiful than I could have imagined." She will tilt, drop in more colors, imprint, spray, and spatter, continually looking for the direction the painting is taking. "It's a game of nerve, of spontaneous decisions. The paint always wins and I am glad to be on its team."

Sally Lamson, Executive Director of the Creative Arts Center in Chatham, remembers that back in the 1980s, Pratt was known as the "quiet revolutionary." Says Lamson, "Although she is extraordinarily organized, Elizabeth enjoys taking risks and being spontaneous when she is painting. Not knowing exactly how the painting will turn out is part of the challenge. Innovative and certainly ahead of her time, Libby brought excitement and exploration to the study of watercolor



Elizabeth Pratt, "Spring Mists," watercolor

"Elizabeth Pratt's work has a luminous quality achieved by building one transparent wash over another . . . She has a strong feeling for design and placement and a pleasing play between warm and cool color. I would say she is a colorist, using color for its own sake and not merely in a descriptive way. The color in her aquatic painting is delightful and appears at times as changeable as a rainbow."

— LORING W. COLEMAN, NATIONAL ACADEMY/AMERICAN WATERCOLOR SOCIETY

painting on Cape Cod."

In describing her fearless approach to watercolor painting, Pratt has said, "I've gotten various textures by applying paint to hot press paper through crushed tissue paper and then removing the tissue. I've also had success by applying paint to the paper and then pressing crushed tissue, wax paper or clear plastic wrap into the wet paint. I've rolled a brayer over wet paint and put paint on a brayer to roll it onto the paper. I've brushed color and India ink onto paper, partially dried it with a hair dryer and then sprayed it with water to wash off the damp paint while leaving tints in patterns. I've displaced wet paint by sprinkling it with water or grains of salt. I've taken a wet painting-in-progress, flattened it against a sheet of Plexiglass, and gone back to work on what was left on the paper. I've applied globs of color and tilted the paper until it ran.

I've splattered a second color onto a first, and I've glazed a thin layer over paint over dry color." And she adds the most important point, the ingredient that is evident in all her work: "I've had fun!"

Pratt studied at the Dayton Art Institute and married right after earning her B.A. in Fine Arts at William and Mary. She began a family while continuing her studies through workshops. At 28, the family moved to Morocco where she taught, sold her work and was commissioned to do a portrait of the King. She made many trips to Europe's museums and her sensitivity was increased by seeing the Masters. Upon her return to the United States, she became a juried member of the Washington Watercolor Society. She co-founded, and later became Director of, the Spectrum Gallery in Washington D.C. During that period, her watercolors were acquired by government agen-



cies, corporations and well-known collectors.

In 1978, she moved to Boston and earned the prerequisite first-place awards to be named a Copley Master. She also became a juried member of the New England Watercolor Society and was an integral part of their museum shows throughout the region. Her work has been accepted into National Watercolor exhibitions in ten states and she is a juried member of

Audubon Artists, New York City, and the New England Watercolor Society. Pratt has taught at the Creative Arts Center in Chatham, Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, the Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis, and at the Cahoon Museum in Cotuit.

Pratt's work has been featured in many periodicals, including *American Art Collector*, *Artist Magazine*, *Arts & Antiques*, *Boston Magazine*, *Review Magazine* and *Cape Arts Review*. She



will also be featured in the August 2008 issue of *American Art Collector*. Her work and techniques have been covered in many books, including *The Best of Watercolor* by Betty Lou Schlem and Tom Nicolas, among others. Charles Le Clair, author of *The Art of Watercolor* and Dean at the Tyler School of Art, Temple University, devoted a chapter of his book to her processes, saying: "Indeed, for many painters experimentation itself, rather

than subject matter or design, is the starting point and ultimate inspiration for their work. Elizabeth Pratt is just such a person." ▲

- Elizabeth Pratt is exclusively represented by **Addison Art Gallery** in Orleans.

Above left: "Sweeping In," watercolor
Above right: "Deep Waters," watercolor