

On Page and Paper

Talents of a painter and a children's book maker



Watercolorist David Belling paints landmarks and sights that stir memories and create a sense of familiarity.

PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

WATERCOLOR CONNECTIONS

Believing that the Sanibel Lighthouse is something “every artist in this area has to paint,” watercolorist David Belling made sure to include that landmark in his portfolio of landscape paintings. But he is after much more than creating renderings of the tried and trite. He wants to capture the spirit of Southwest Florida by painting those scenes that carry bits of its history.

“I have a certain set of eyes,” Belling explains. “I think that comes from my creative years in advertising. We had many outdoor recreation clients, a lot of boats, and I was able to place those boats in locations that made them look exciting and interesting. I think that translates into my ability to paint a scene. People will look at my work and say, ‘I’ve driven past that everyday and never saw it like that.’”

Throughout his career in the advertis-

ing business in Wisconsin, Belling painted to relieve the pressures of his fast-paced, deadline-driven work. In 1987, his paintings were “discovered” by an international art dealer and his works began to be purchased by corporations and private collectors, to show up in galleries, and win awards.

In 1991, he moved to Cape Coral and started Tuzee Associates, an advertising company, with a friend. After selling it to



tion and want to take away that memory,” Belling says. “I did a painting of Cabbage Key, for example. It’s a lovely spot and a lot of people vacation there. It’s probably one of my most popular prints, I guess because people feel they have a connection to it.”

And that’s exactly what Belling hopes to create through his paintings—a sense of connection to the beauty he sees around him. He wants to discover and share the overlooked pockets of life’s landscape, so that others can see through his eyes.

a large Milwaukee firm, Belling decided two years ago to move his hobby to center stage.

“Fortunately, because of the advertising, I don’t have to make a living at painting,” he says with a laugh. “And I’m not on deadline, so painting is still fun. I’m under no pressure.”

Perhaps it is that lack of pressure that imbues Belling’s paintings with their freshness and sparkle. His clouds seud across the sky. His water glistens with reflections of the sun. And his structures—the fish shacks, for instance, which are a recurring theme—seem to lean from the paper, yearning to tell their tales.

“I’ve always been fascinated by old buildings,” Belling notes. “The fish shacks have tons of history and are very unique. And I love the commercial fishermen; they have great stories.”

Although Belling still frequently paints on location, he also now paints in his studio overlooking the Caloosahatchee, working from photographs he has taken. The immediacy of the on-site experience led him to his chosen medium of watercolors.

“I don’t think I’d have the patience for a painting that would take months to complete,” he says. “With watercolors, everything is done very quickly. You can do a painting in an hour, if you want. And with watercolors, there is not a lot of equipment. You can paint anywhere.”

Although locals are most familiar with Belling’s Southwest Florida scenes, he paints anywhere and everywhere,

including Cedar Key and Appalachicola in Florida, Chesapeake Bay, and Northern Wisconsin, where he returns every year. Last year he traveled to Alaska and was so taken with



David Belling enjoys painting old buildings, including (top to bottom) Whidden’s Marina on Boca Grande, Safety Harbor Fish House off North Captiva, and Pine Island Sound Fish House.

the chance to paint its majestic mountains that he plans to return there this summer. Regardless of the locale, the public’s reaction is universally warm and positive.

“I think what people like about my paintings is that they recognize the loca-

David Belling’s works are available locally at Sanibel Art & Frame, Crossed Palms Gallery in Bokeelia (Pine Island), Pirates Ketch in Punta Gorda, Portfolio in Bell Tower Shops in Ft. Myers, and the ACT Gallery in downtown Ft. Myers.



AN ISLAND OF ART

Useppa Island Club provides idyllic setting for local artists' show



PHOTOS BY KELLY MADDEN

Art on Useppa showcased paintings, glassworks, and sculptures by Perry and Joanne Thompson, Debra Stone, Jessica Smith Geraghty, James Ferrari, and Genene Nell.

Art lovers searching for just the right tropical painting, colorful glass creation, or glistening bronze sculpture found them all April 9 and 10 at the second *Art on Useppa*.

Five local artists banded together to mount the show, coordinating the event on the private-island retreat, a haven for sport fishermen and island lovers for generations. Home of the Collier Inn, Useppa Island is between Pine Island and Boca

Grande and accessible only by boat.

"The logistics are a bit different from doing a show on land," says Perry Thompson, one of the participating artists. "We obviously take all the pieces out by boat, and get them up to the pool deck by golf cart. It's a perfect island ambience for showing tropical art, but you can't just load up your van and drive to the gallery; it presents some unique challenges, but it's certainly well worth the effort."

Thompson and his wife, Joanne, create large colorful paintings in an emulsion-manipulation technique, resulting in soft shapes and deep textures. He also displayed several large glass plates in vivid and bold geometric patterns, which he handcrafted and fired in his Cape Coral studio.

Painters and muralists Debra Stone and Jessica Smith Geraghty participated in the show for the second time, where they



showed their paintings. Smith Geraghty's colorful and detailed acrylic works draw the eye, and seemingly tell a story to the viewer. Stone's works are bold and powerful—visually appealing and thought-provoking. She and Smith Geraghty are well-known mural artists, and have done numerous works throughout Southwest Florida.

Large bronze sculptures depicting native wildlife, such as tarpon and loggerhead sea turtles, were displayed by metal artist James Ferrari. The colors of the shiny surfaces and the realism of his subjects created impressive presence. The tarpon looked especially at home in this setting.

Rounding out the show was Hawaiian-born Genevieve Nell, displaying her colorful oil and acrylic paintings themed by beach scenes from the Aloha State, as well as shell-craft and floral necklaces.

The island population was estimated at full capacity for the weekend event, as there were meetings scheduled for members of the Useppa Island Club and homeowners, not to mention a kids' fishing tournament and several Easter events. Vincent Formosa, president and general manager of the club, viewed the second Art on Useppa as a success, saying he felt the residents and guests enjoy the opportunity to see and learn more about the art of a wide variety of local artists.

— Kelly Madden



If it's worth a trip it's on

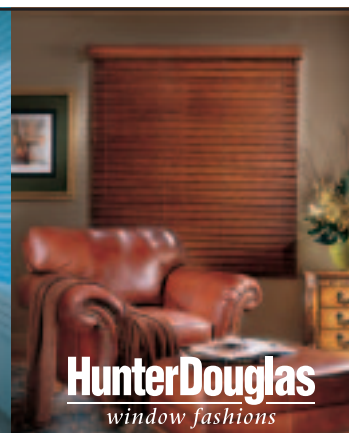


For Information Call:

Collier: 239/417-4756 Lee: 239/415-4756



Top Quality • Window Coverings • Professional Installation
Phone: 239.229.3510 ~ Fax: 239.567.0855



READING, WRITING, AND INSPIRING

With more than a dozen popular children's books to her credit, Helen Kettelman definitely has a way with words—and with young readers. Three of her books have earned Children's Choice Awards, a selection determined by youngsters' votes.

Now based on Sanibel, she has lived all over the country and often sets her stories in the places she's known. She also travels the country, teaching children about reading and writing. We asked Kettelman to reflect on her art—and her dreams.

Times of the Islands: What started you writing?

Helen Kettelman: I think it was a love of reading and a love of children. I started writing for adults but found quickly that writing for children was my true love. I think writing for children is more important than writing for adults, because, with adults, you're writing for people who already read. With kids, you're introducing them to the idea of wanting to learn to read.

TOTI: Your latest book, *Armadilly Chili*, seems to be a Southwestern retelling of the Little Red Hen story. Do most of your ideas come from retelling stories?

HK: I've only retold two stories: *Armadilly Chili* and *Bubba the Cowboy Prince*, which is my update on the Cinderella story. I go to schools all over the country and talk to the kids. I tell them ideas come from everywhere. For me, it's a phrase or a word or the sounds of words. My book, *Not Yet, Yvette*, for instance. I was talking to my friend Yvette and noticed the rhythm of the words when I said, "Not yet" to her.

I tell kids, with their own stories, there are four things to include: a main character; what's the problem; struggle—a story is not a story if it doesn't have struggle, so I tell them to give their character three things to solve; and, of course, some trouble along the way. It's not any fun if everything works right away.

TOTI: Your main reason for writing is to inspire kids to read?

HK: It's kind of twofold. Some kids have never been read to, and that puts them behind from the beginning. I think we all have to teach kids to love to read.



PHOTO BY KATHLEEN BLASE

Children throughout the country are familiar with the books of Helen Kettelman, who now lives on Sanibel.

So, yes, I want to inspire kids to read. But I also think it's important for kids to use their imagination. If you're creative, you're going to be better off. And the more you use your imagination, the better you get at it. I spend at least a week a month on the road [visiting schools]. It's so great to work with kids. You can see when they're turned on.

TOTI: You often base your stories in the places you've lived. Does that mean we can look forward to a book set in Southwest Florida?

HK: I am going to guarantee you that! That's the beauty of living in a new place. There's so much to learn. I've been think-

ing about a Florida tall tale. I love tall tales because they're such a part of our American literary heritage. I might do a Florida story about a hurricane.

Helen Kettelman's Web site, www.helenkettelman.com, is chock-full of information about her background, writing in general, her books, and arranging school visits. It also contains activities for teachers and youngsters. Armadilly Chili is available through most chain bookstores. A new book, The Great Cake Bake, is due out soon.

Janina Birtolo is a freelance writer and actor based in Naples.