



The Color of LIGHT

Painter Donna Burgess has been capturing the natural splendor of the Emerald Coast with watercolors for almost 25 years.

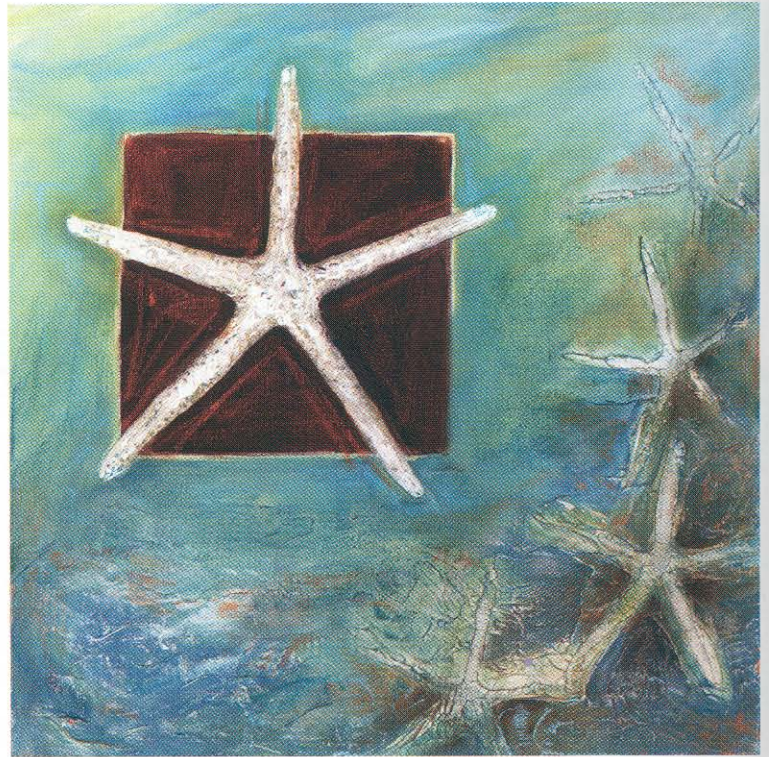
It's the oft-told tale of a hobby turned obsession, only this time, the results have been quite beautiful. For Sandestin-area artist Donna Burgess, it only took a few simple watercolor classes to propel her into a career as well-known and well-loved painter. She began with a small gallery in Fort Walton in 1985 and has since moved to Destin and now Sandestin. "I took classes when my kids were little," she said, "and it has just grown from there."

It's not hard to discover where the inspiration for her colorful creations comes from. Most artists find their muse in their surroundings, what they live with every day. Fortunately for Burgess (and those who admire her work), her "every day" includes the brilliant blue skies, tropical foliage, soft, white sand and glistening emerald-green waters of the beach. "I paint what I love—the beach, the harbors and all the critters that go with it," she said.

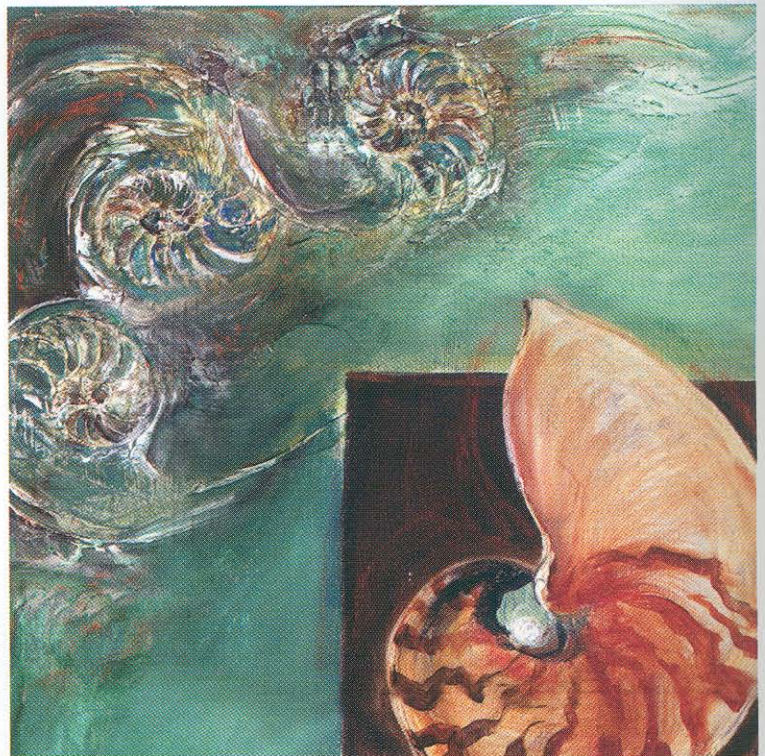
While her beach scenes are lovely and serene and her home has no lack of worthy seaside subjects, it is area animals that seem to truly touch her heart. "I am an animal lover, and I love painting the animals of the coast like fish and coastal birds," she said. "I also love painting pets."

Her pet portraits started when she got a Labrador retriever nine years ago. "I did a painting of her, and I just fell in love with her eyes, their expressiveness," she said. "Now I have three dogs, a duck and a rabbit."

Also fueling Burgess' passion for her painting is her love of light and its relationship to the way we all visualize our world. "I love studying how the light hits



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things,” she said. “Here we have such wonderful sunlight. It’s perfect the way light shines through a window, the way light plays on flowers and leaves. I’m not a landscape painter. Instead I do close up cross sections. I want to find the essence of a subject.”

Light also influences her palette, infusing vibrant hues and soft washes of color into every brush stroke. Burgess’ strong use of color to imbue a bit of fantasy on an otherwise realistic depiction has become one of her hallmarks. “Color makes everything so much more interesting. I take the color it actually is, but spice it up a bit,” she said. “If you’re looking at a wicker chair in the sunlight, it won’t be just one color, it will reflect the colors near it. I just intensify that.”

Many who’ve grown to know her paintings seem to prefer her view of things. “I was at Gulf World with my nine-year-old granddaughter, and we were looking at sea turtles. I asked her if she remembered the sea turtles I had painted and she said, ‘Yes, but queenie [what she calls her grandmother], yours are much more colorful. Do they have any of those sea turtles here? I want to see them.’”

Another Burgess hallmark is her collaboration with the Sandestin Wine Festival for over 20 years. She painted the official festival poster each year, and just retired from that duty last year. “I had such fun doing those,” she said. “I enjoyed painting the wine bottles, the intricate labels, the light reflecting off of glasses, but I just thought it was time to move on.” There was such uproar from wine lovers and col-

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Find out more about Donna Burgess and view her work at www.artzbydonnaburgess.com

lectors though, that while she’s no longer painting the “official” poster, she did a special edition for those interested. She’s doing the same thing this year.

When pressed for the number of paintings she’s done, the prolific painter admitted she had no idea, but she took a guess. “I probably do between 30 and 40 new pieces a year,” she said.

New on her schedule are the classes she’s recently begun teaching. “I haven’t taught in 10 years, but I love it,” she said. “They really make me a better painter, because every time I explain the way light works or demonstrate a technique I’m kind of re-training myself.”

Most would argue that she doesn’t need much “re-training,” but all artists evolve and grow in response to their changing lives. For Burgess, that life is a content one with her pets, her husband, her children and grandchildren and, of course, her beach. **ML**