

Ninth Annual Open Studios Lets You Peek Into Another Life

10/7/93

By Lolly Peterson

When I was asked in kindergarten to draw a picture of what I wanted to be when I grew up, I drew a picture of a man in a beret with a handlebar moustache painting on an easel. Now I think I have a better idea of what a working artist is really like, but this image is formed by media profiles of so-called successful or celebrity artists and their world of museum retrospectives and administrative assistants.

To bridge the gap between visual artists and the public, many of whom carry around the same glamorized images of artists as I do, local artists are opening their studios to the public in the ninth annual Santa Cruz Open Studio event. Open Studios was created by the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County, a private, nonprofit organization, in response to "a need to better serve visual artists in Santa Cruz County," according to Program Manager Robin Larsen. To get an idea of the variety of works and styles that artists will be showing, check out the preview exhibition currently showing at the Santa Cruz Art League through October 24. "The best way to do *Open Studios* is to look

of Open Studios is to, "create a marketing link between the artists and public in the absence of galleries in Santa Cruz," the benefits for the artist and public go beyond simple acquisition and economic validation. For artists, the exposure of their private life and work to the public can be both an unnerving and educational experience. "Open Studios for the artist is a very strenuous affair, because it means that you are exposed to people, while artists usually work alone," says painter Linde Martin. But the connection with others can ultimately serve as a source of stimulation and inspiration. "It's important for an artist to show their work, especially if they don't normally compete in the art market," says ceramicist Hollis Hansen. "Although it's a big risk because you feel vulnerable, it's validating because it's the completion of the process of your idea going from your hands to another person."

The greatest educational benefit the community can reap from Open Studio comes from that live interaction between artist and viewer, an exchange that is not allowed in other settings. "People get more out of this than a gallery situation because they can have a dialogue with the artist, which is much less impersonal and intimi-

ferent processes by which people make it possible. "When you are creative, people often put you on a pedestal because they see you as removed from life," says Martin, "but you always come down because you are very human. You're just like everybody else, and by that I mean that we are all creative."

converted into a studio and home is full of monstrous mounds made of remnants that could have come from both a junkyard and a forest. "I like elemental materials: stuff that's inherent to the existing composition of earth," Hepburn says. "I'm not into colors or textures other than what is inherent to the materials themselves."

Though Hepburn's pieces are made by "natural" means, they come together to form images that are definitely more of man and his manipulation of the earth's products than of forms found in nature. His work, however, exposes the thin border between the two. "I've always been equally interested by natural wonders as well as the industrial wasteland," he says. "So much of life on the cosmic or metaphysical level is mirrored by the physical world, so that's why I like working with sculpture--it's that physical, real expression of something. It's not a representation of something. It is."

Out of every artists' reason for doing art grows the way they want to express it, and hence, the people they want to express it for. This is part of what makes a style individual, and the attention that Hepburn's pieces demand is part of his style. "I've always wanted to do public art. I enjoy showing

in galleries, but those kind of spaces are so removed from everyday life experience. I like to work on a scale and on a subject matter outdoors, where people who had no intentions of going to a gallery or a museum might bump into it and scratch their heads and just wonder."

When I first saw **Linde Martin's** paintings at a café downtown, I sat and stared at them for hours without really understanding why. I knew that the colors seemed to spiral out from a center of light that drew me in, but I couldn't put my finger on what was so mystical about them. In person, Martin is composed and brusque, but when she begins to talk about what she has been doing for 43 years, the source of that mysticism is revealed.

"I've gone through a whole process of change, from realism to abstract expressionism, but now I just paint from the soul," she says. "I try to paint the human spirit." It's that depiction of the spirit that people react to and find so mesmerizing, provoking them



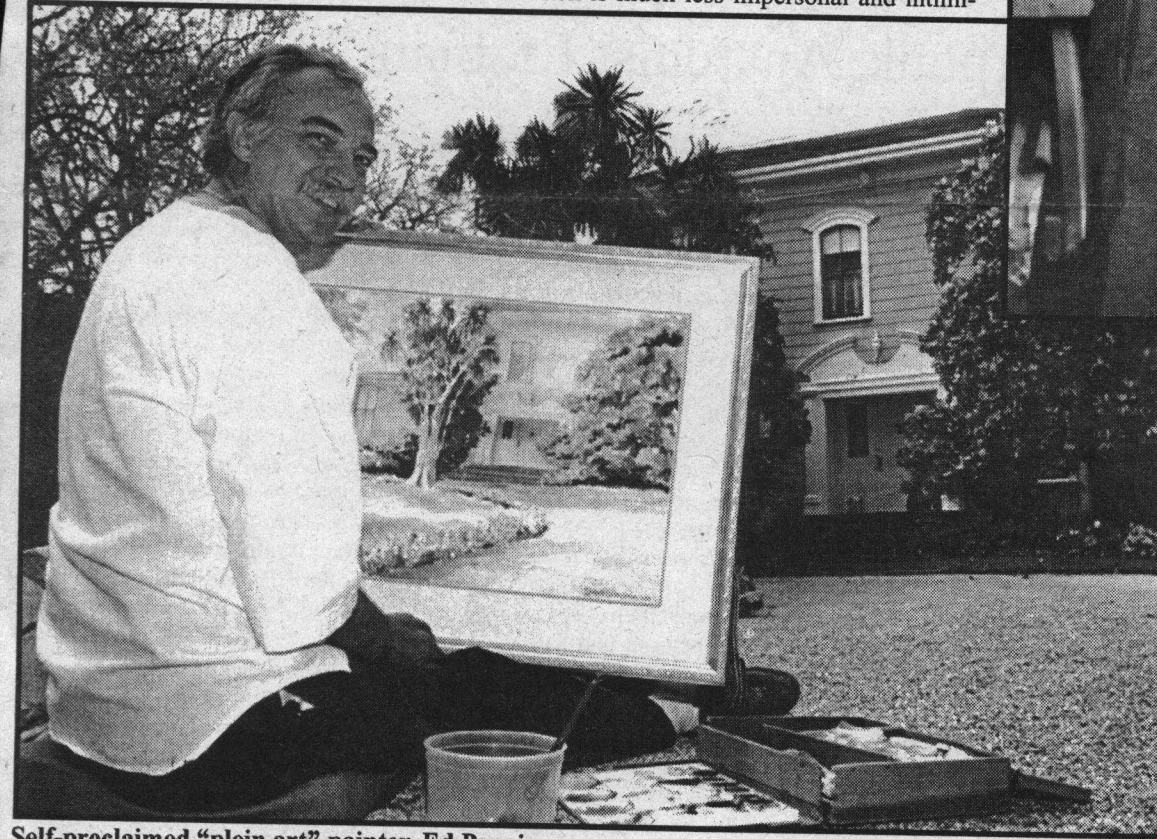
Hollis Hansen sculpts with porcelain.

Every artist has their own story of why and how they do what they do, and learning about and being inspired by those stories is what Open Studios makes possible. Following are the stories of four artists who will be opening their studios to the public; but remember that these people are only a small sample of the hundreds of artists, all with their own story, who will be participating in Open Studios this year.

Kenneth Hepburn arrived in Santa Cruz seven years ago after earning a BA in photography on the East Coast. He had begun to move from photography to sculpture, but decided to make sculpture a full-time profession when a stranger bought one of his pieces after seeing it unloaded from a truck. Now the warehouse that Hepburn has

dating than seeing a piece in a museum," says Bischoff. "When you have a direct experience with the environment, you can learn so much more because you can ask questions and see the where and the how of the artists' work."

Perhaps the most important thing that this interaction provides is letting people see how exciting it is to express yourself and the dif-



Self-proclaimed "plein art" painter, Ed Penniman.

at artists' work in the exhibition and see if any of it touches you, then seek out those that do," says Susan Bischoff, head curator for the League. The artists studio openings are divided into two weekends, plus a third encore weekend, and the Art League provides a map to the location of the artists' establishments.

Although Larsen says the primary focus

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to sit for hours staring into her canvases as I did at the cafe. "What's wonderful is when I touch other people with that spirit. Sometimes in describing a painting, two or three people will use exactly the same words for what they see. That means I'm touching them."

Martin works in a spartan, white studio on Potrero Street, where she listens to classical music and creates her paintings by squirting paint directly onto paper or linen, then moving the colors around with a palette knife until they find the juxtaposition she wants. Following the impulse from inspiration to technique is hard for her to describe. "It's so integrated. It's a total process. When I paint I go into what I call the fourth dimension. It's a place of total peace."

Martin gives frequent talks locally on her vision of creativity and how to tap into it. "To be creative you have to let go, and when you let go creativity flows through you like a stream. Everybody can do it. We're held back because we're taught to judge our art and ourselves, and that fear is imprisoning."

Ed Penniman calls himself a "plein air" painter, a term from the era of Monet and Gauguin which translates roughly into "open air" and refers to those artists whose studio is the great outdoors. A watercolor-

ist, Penniman paints quietly vibrant still lifes and landscapes. "My painting is very much a meditation and a way to enjoy God's work," he says. "I really enjoy being in nature and I want to become one with it."

Penniman's respect and appreciation for nature and life comes in part from knowing what a limited existence feels like. Raised in Santa Cruz, Penniman was always told that he was talented in his art classes. His grandmother, who was also a watercolorist, as well as one of the founders of the Santa Cruz Art League, bought him a paint box when he was seven years old. Penniman graduated from art school and worked as a graphic artist for 20 years when he was struck by Guilliane-Barre syndrome, an extremely rare polyneuropathic disease where the muscles are unable to receive messages from the brain, resulting in complete paralysis for several months. During the time he was bed-ridden, Penniman began to take up watercolor painting again by holding the paintbrush in his mouth. The act of painting, which he had neglected in his years as a corporate artist, brought him "a lot of serenity," he says. "You might say my painting goal was accelerated significantly by the disability."

Eventually Penniman was able to use his hands with the help of a harness, and now

has regained almost all of his capabilities and travels around the area looking for inspiration. "I'll be driving along and something will speak to me--there'll be a harmonious feeling about the way the land looks or works or the composition or the feeling and I'll be drawn to that place. When I'm painting I'll be in harmony with the nature of the place. I become in stride with nature, and to me that's enriching."

Hollis Hansen went to one year of nursing school before getting married at a young age. "I hated it, but I got A's in sculpture," she says. "Even though I came from an artistic family, I always felt inadequate because my brothers were so talented. But when my professors encouraged me, I took some classes, went back to school and rediscovered clay, but approached it as a sculptor instead of a potter." Hansen now creates sculptures out of slabs of pristine porcelain, folded and carved at the edges. She also creates "Paleolithic" plates inscribed with ancient symbols and baked to a convincing blackness in a Japanese kiln. The oven, called a Raku oven, sits in the backyard of Hansen's seaside home in Aptos, which is filled with sculptures and photographs of other countries. Her studio takes up the converted garage and an addi-

tional large room. Appalled at the detraction of art from the public school system, Hansen began teaching pottery to children years ago. "I love teaching art and teaching a process. My work is so process-oriented because that's where ideas are born. When you first have an idea, it has a raw vitality but it's a little awkward. Even when you have the finished piece you have to take it further—it's like a tea that has to brew for a while."

Hansen draws her inspiration from American Indian rock art, prehistoric hieroglyphs and anything else that involves other cultures, which she finds fascinating. She also draws ideas, like so many other artists living in this small eden, from the environment around her. "Sitting by the sea is essential to my work—taking what I observe from nature and playing it back so that they're an echo. It's not a direct interpretation of what I see, just my own feelings." **CHP**

Santa Cruz Open Studios 1993 will be happening the weekends of Oct. 9-10 and 16-17. An encore weekend will be held Oct. 23-24, where some artists will reopen their studios to the public. The Santa Cruz Art League's Preview exhibition will be up through Oct. 24.