

Celebrations of Life

by Kathleen McMillen

BETTY NANCE SMITH CONSIDERS ART TO BE A CELEBRATION OF LIFE and a gift to be shared. A native of northern New Mexico, she shares her love of life through her paintings, which reveal a rich sense of light and color. Her masterful brushstrokes give even the most common objects a hitherto unnoticed richness and beauty.

For 25 years, Smith has been traveling to North San Diego County to paint the cliffs along the beach that so remind her of the bluffs near her home. She spends hours just watching the water move and reflect light. Of her seascapes, she says, "I have observed the ocean all my life and have a very good memory for what things look like and the colors they are at different times of the year. I love painting water and feel I understand it better than many other aspects of nature. The ocean is so much like glass that I can take my first-hand experience painting glass and use it to decide how light will be affected by the surfaces of the water—whether it goes through, whether it reflects, what angle it is reflecting from, and so on."

Smith believes that art is a life-long learning process and she regularly studies with other artists. She doesn't want to be like them, or paint like they do, she only wants to learn from them. Years ago, studying with well-known animal artist Robert Bateman, she learned that her focus should be on becoming more herself and his words of wisdom inspired her as much as his art. He told her, "What is important is to learn to see better and develop yourself as an artist. I've traveled my journey and you are traveling your journey. God would not ask me why I am not Michelangelo, the question would more likely be, Why am I not Robert Bateman?"



Smith has spent her life living and painting in beautiful Los Alamos, New Mexico. She grew up playing the piano and exploring the great outdoors. As a child, she had a wide variety of environments to explore. Her grandparents live at the beach on the East Coast and her parents maintain an old mining cabin, with its own beaver pond, high in the Colorado Rocky Mountains.

Smith loved doing art and had a flair for it but she had no idea it would become a life-long obsession. Originally her goal was to become a special education teacher and she studied art with the intention of using it as a tool for working with the children. However, as she studied art, her focus changed. She still remembers her dad's advice when she asked him what he thought about her becoming an artist, "Well honey, you are really good at it and I know you love it, but you won't ever get rich doing it." She simply decided that, for her, doing what she loved was more important than having a lot of money.

After earning her Bachelor of Arts degree from Eastern New Mexico University, Smith was able to spend a year studying at the Sydney College of the Arts in Sydney, Australia, on a Rotary Graduate Fellowship. She lived in the International

Above: Orchid Reflection, 16 x 20
Left: Blue Sky Day, 24 x 30

Below top: Veggies, 10 x 20

Below middle: Zinnia with Purple, 10 x 20

Below bottom: Red with Flower Celebration, 10 x 20



Dormitory and met many other students from around the world. When her studies were complete, she spent the next six weeks visiting and traveling with friends in Singapore, Thailand, Japan and Indonesia. Thus began many life-long friendships and a love for travel to exotic places.

Smith had surprisingly immediate success for someone whose sole interest was to follow her passion. In college, she'd





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Artist Profile

studied illustration, thinking it was, at least, a practical application for her talent. On a whim, she submitted a drawing of a lion to *New Mexico Wildlife Magazine* and they published it. She contributed her work to the magazine for 10 years and one of her paintings was chosen for a New Mexico Wildlife Conservation stamp.

For 13 years, Smith worked in watercolors. Then, about 12 years ago, she began studying the Old Masters and admiring the techniques they used working in oil. She admired Cary Ennis' work and so enrolled in her course on still-life oil painting. It was love at first dabble for the gooey, malleable textures and colors of the oil paints. In no time at all, she had converted her studio and was a student of a new genre.

As much as Smith enjoys the great outdoors, she prefers painting in her studio. Most of the objects she uses in her still life paintings have come from exotic places and there is a story about how each one came to be part of her collection. Painting them is her way of honoring their beauty and her ambition is to bring beauty into a world that is not always beautiful. She is also a serious gardener and her yard supplies a constant flow of fresh flowers for her work.

A simple trip to the grocery store produce department may provide Smith with the keystone of a new painting. She then

spends hours setting up the perfect scene and deciding what angle she wants to paint it from. On the canvas, she lays out the entire painting's structure, including shadows and notes on colors, reflections, and how the objects play on each other. She has learned to recognize which of her props will fade and die first, so once the basics of the painting are down, her focus goes to completing those areas of the composition.

Smith's husband, Roger, shares her travel bug and they have traveled to Europe, Mexico, Jamaica, Hawaii and the Bahamas.

When her girls, Sheridan and Sonja, were small, she found it difficult to find time to paint. To ensure that she would be forced to put in some studio time, she committed herself to participate in a local artist studio tour. Unexpectedly, Sonja's birth coincided with a tour date and Smith spent the day on her feet with contractions. Betty Nance Smith is a woman who keeps her commitments!

The work of Betty Nance Smith is available at Cedros Village Fine Art Gallery in the Cedros Design Center. A special show titled *Celebrations Of Life* will hang until July 31. The gallery is located at 348 S. Cedros, Solana Beach. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 12 to 5 p.m. Please call 858-720-1838 or check on-line at www.cedrosvillagefineart.com. □

Kathleen McMillen is an art consultant who has been active in the area for more than 20 years. She may be reached at 760.942-1345.



Hibiscus Reflection, 12 x 16



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