

Marie Sakellarion



“There’s a lot more to decorative painting than people realize,” said Marie Sakellarion of New Salem, as we settled into her well appointed home studio. Tidy arrangements of brushes stood on two workbenches, and the wall behind her was filled with a gorgeous full spectrum of hundreds of colors of liquid acrylic. Reference books and magazines filled the shelves and sun streamed in at mid-day through the bare trees of February. “It comes from ancient times...every culture has its own tradition of folk art, painting done by ordinarily folk and handed down through families and within communities,” explained Sakellarion. “Another thing that distinguishes it from fine art, is that it tends to be done on useful items rather than on canvas: it is painting on furniture, kitchen ware, cabinets, boxes, small items. When the Irish started bringing tin ware into the US back in the 1700s, they found that it sold better if it was painted, so they just started doing that and it evolved from there.”

As far as Sakellarion's personal development as an artist, she says “I’ve always loved art. From he time I was a kid, through my teen years, I always had little projects throughout the house, always making something with cloth, fabric, paint.... Also, I grew up at a time when children spent most of their time outdoors, you got up in the morning and went out, you came in to go to the bathroom, and that was it. I used to make all manner of things with grass, twigs, flowers, and leaves, and make

clothing out of fern fronds and hats and jewelry out of flowers, we did that all the



time!"

Sakellarion retained a deep respect and love for the natural world. Coming to the Quabbin area 16 years ago increased her appreciation of protected wilderness after seeing "the mess they made in Southern New Hampshire" after she moved from there, with strip malls and traffic lights dominating once rural acreage. "It might have something to do with the Quabbin Reservoir, too. Since people out here had the long arm of government take things away from them, they might be more inclined to conserving the land and maintaining it, appreciating it a bit more."

She paints using a fusion of styles and patterns that she has studied over the years through workshops, classes, and other reference materials, depending on the effect she wants to produce. A wide variety of styles are apparent in the items in her studio, from a black tray dry-brushed with fruits and bearing a motto around the edge, to a boldly painted cat's face with cobalt blue eyes and practically every hair detailed in thin brush strokes, to village scenes that are full of the kind of detail and quaint characteristics that have endeared folk art to many.

Almost 35 years have gone into her practice of decorative painting, starting with classes taught by an artist called Suzy Saunders, in Byfield near Newburyport, Mass. Saunders eventually employed her in her store, helping make a variety of painted items and hiring her to teach beginners classes in



the craft.

Through the 80s and 90s, the demand was such that they could barely keep items in stock, they sold so quickly. The development of organizations such as the Society of Decorative Painters helped spread the trend, and tole painting, as the practice is called pertaining to painting on wooden items, is still a popular craft today even though the heyday is over. Sakellarion belongs to a New England chapter and says they get together and work on civic projects like the Angel Box program. "We paint these boxes, and give them to hospitals so that their long term patients can have something to put all their stuff in. And there are other programs for the neonatal units, where we make boxes so they can go home with something to put all their stuff into, too. We also have conventions with classes all day long for three or four days."

Neighbor and fellow coop member Sandy Tobin told her about the opportunities available through the Shelburne Arts Coop to sell her wares. They had both been members of a similar group effort in

Orange, the now-defunct Quabbin Woods store. Sakellarion has been pleased by the sales at the Co-op so far and enjoys being part of the group. Some things that Sakellarion has been doing when she is not practicing decorative painting: for over ten years she was the manager of the forest retreat at the Insight Meditation Center in Barre, Mass, and she has been a practicing Buddhist since she was a young



adult.

More recently she has been involved in the Scott Kiloby Living Inquiries as an online facilitator, working with people who want to apply the Living Inquiries to their lives. According to the website, Living Inquiries helps “point you to the always, already-here, peaceful clarity of being in the present moment without identifying with the various temporary words, pictures, emotions and sensations that arise and fall.”

Marie will be having a show with Sally Chaffee titled "Cornucopia" in October.

Photos, Marie in her studio with traditional folk art painting, Coasters, her cat face painting and Poppies.