



JRB ART AT THE ELMS

Paseo Arts District

LIVING COLOR

By Joy Reed Belt



Currently on Display in the Taos Room at JRB Art at the Elms



Currently on Display in the Beaux-Arts Room at JRB Art at The Elms

Last week we repainted four rooms of the Gallery in vibrant colors and I was reminded of when I first became aware of color as its own “thing.” Of course, I had been taught to recognize colors as a child and long since claimed “blue” and “yellow” as my personal favorites, but color designations seemed almost utilitarian to me, as used in stoplights and temperatures. In 1999, John Belt gave me a “Gift Certificate for Eight Painting Lessons” with Kay Orr in The Paseo. When he presented the certificate, John told me that he hoped learning how to paint would give me an easily accessible way to relax. I tried to bargain with him for two weeks stay at Canyon Ranch instead, but he insisted that I should take painting lessons and “see what happens.” Well, what happened was that those eight lessons changed my life.

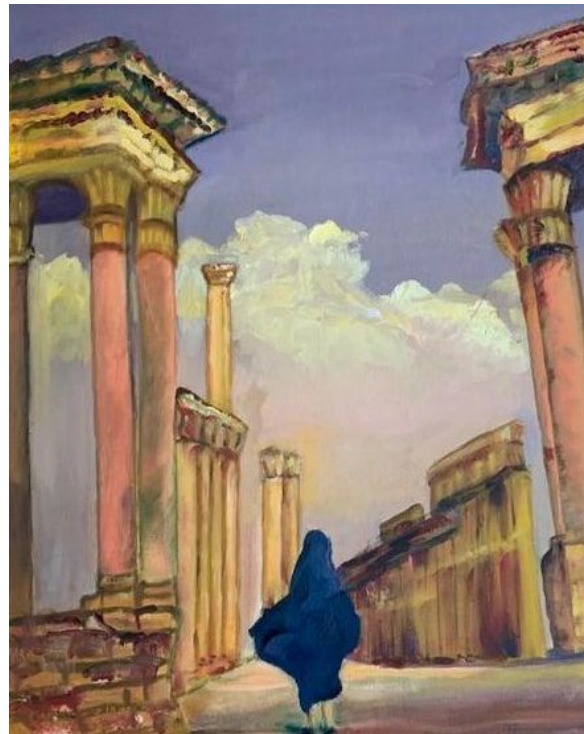
The Gift Certificate stated that prior to attending class, I should meet with the instructor and pick up a list of supplies. I called and arranged to talk with Kay. She asked me a lot of questions, including why I wanted to study painting. When I told her that it was John’s idea, not mine, she wisely commented that maybe my husband saw something in me that I did not see. She also asked me to select a medium. I selected “oils” because, as I told her, “they take longer to dry, and I can make changes to the painting until the very end.” She handed me a list of the required supplies including tubes of oil paints with the most amazing names and I drove straight to Triangle A & E to make my purchases.

Reading the names of the color of the recommended pigments was an emotional experience for me. The names: "Alizarin Crimson," "Indian Yellow," "Cerulean and Prussian Blues," "Vermilion," and "Raw Sienna," still do affect me, conjuring up magical, colorful images. I walked into Triangle and spied a small stand of Rembrandt Paints. The colors weren't on the outside of the containers so without thinking I immediately began taking the lids off the tubes to see the colors. When the staff began surrounding me, I told them I planned on purchasing the little display. They just stood there and looked at me. Fortunately, one of the workers recognized me, and they didn't have me arrested. I bought the display and I used those paints in my first class, making Kay's job of teaching primary and secondary colors more difficult.

John was very pleased with himself for initiating my foray into art. He asked a costume designer who had a studio in Paseo to make me an artist's smock replete with a bow and a beret. After he presented those to me, he asked that I have a photographer on the street take my photograph and give it to him for his birthday. Dutiful wife that I was, he got his photo.



JRB in 1999



Oil painting by JRB in 1999

Several months later, I went on a business trip to Paris. Although I was only going to be there a week or so, my primary personal objective was to manage my meetings so that I could visit Sennelier at 3 Quai Voltaire. To call Sennelier an art supply store would not only be incorrect, but insulting. Three centuries old and a pioneer in the manufacturing and selling of pastels and paints, it is a place that is worshiped by artists. The impressionists bought pastels, canvasses and papers there. The chemists at Sennelier's are credited with creating oil pastel sticks for Picasso. I longed to buy my first "real" easel from this "international temple of all things art." When I entered the shop, I was greeted by Dominique Sennelier, wearing a white chemist's coat. He sold me a wonderful double-sided easel. When I fretted about what could happen to the easel in route, he wrote his mobile number of his card and told me to call him personally if there were any difficulties in transition. A world renowned "colorist," Dominique spent quite a bit of time that day talking to me the origins and history of color and the transition of pigments from containment in a pig's bladder to the modern tube. I was enchanted and fascinated and purchased some large pastels in a wooden box. To this day I am transported when I open that box and look at those sticks of pure pigment. Nothing I could ever paint would be important enough for me to use those pastels. In the intervening years I have made several pilgrimages to Sennelier where I always feel a renewed appreciation for the power of color to transform.

The painting lessons I was gifted in 1999 led to my opening a small gallery at 3003A

Paseo Drive. I can remember the colors of specific paintings by the artists we exhibited in that space. A few years later, when we expanded and moved to The Elms, we had the space and individual rooms to really experiment with the presentation of color. Even though I admire black and white, particularly black, and white photographs, the term “living color” really resonates with me. Almost everything in life can be communicated with color. It’s a glorious thing!

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