

COASTAL



Capturing the Essence of New England

Running the Line

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Intense & Focused

With artistic styles that range from bright seascapes and in-your-face florals to figure work, animal portraits, and commercial and web design, it's almost strange to call Cynthia Blair focused. But the description is not off the mark.

*T*hough her interests are wide, the aesthetic the Jamestown artist conveys is unified and clear, with a focus that is never in question.

"It all comes back to enhance the whole in some fashion or another," the Long Island native said of her many interests. "It's the same sense of aesthetics."

When it comes to choosing subjects, Blair said at times she is drawn to the simplicity of a scene, as in her popular paintings of small boats that feature strongly defined images balanced by a dreamy "summer day at the beach" feeling.

At other times, Blair said, she

is moved by an urge to present one subject in great detail, focusing in on the texture or individual facets to really capture its presence, like a recent triptych she made at a Wickford lotus pond.

The three pastel panels bring the viewer right into the lotus plants, depositing him or her in a sea of leaves and blossoms.

"It's very obvious what my focal point is," she said of her style. "I don't leave parts loose."

Another example, an image of sunflowers, recently won an award for Blair. The image is intensely focused on the flowers.



"Vineyard Haven Red" 18x24

"I wanted you to feel the hugeness in those big leaves," the artist said about the piece. Blair said she was driving by a local bakery when she noticed the towering flowers and wanted to capture their size and beauty. She quickly stopped to photograph them for later use.

The pastel painting, "Sunflower Solstice 1" won second place in the Pastel Journal's 2nd annual competition.

Although she works primarily with photographs, Blair said she's very aware of what the camera misses — the added dimension and detail in the shadows of a scene.

"With digital you don't get the same sense as being there. I try to get that elusive quality, that sense of being there, that mood," she said.

She often uses Photoshop to edit and adjust an image until she gets the composition the way she wants it.

These kinds of images are landscapes for Blair, although, she recognizes they don't fit traditional definitions of the style. In her own way, she is looking to capture the essence of the coastal community she lives in, without using recognizable landmarks or horizons.

"I'd rather paint something generic than a landmark," she said.

Instead, she said, she wants to get at the feeling that Jamestown represents for people — it's mood.

Blair didn't start working in pastels until 2002; but, the medium became an immediate favorite.

"I found it very easy and I think I got very proficient very fast," she said. "I think with pastels I can express myself fully."

Although there are advantages to painting oils, Blair prefers pastels for the range of colors she can work with. She has hundreds of pastels — sticks of pure color with very little binding.

"It's like being a kid in a candy store," she said of the endless color options.

She also likes being able to blend the color with her hands both because of the spontaneity that gives her and because she's found the technique enhances the painting's depth of color.

"Instead of lifting color off it, it actually pushes it in," she said, adding, "Usually I want more intensity instead of less."

In the coastal Rhode Island town, Blair is one of five artists who collectively own the Schuck Gallery, where she shows much of her work. The gallery has a summer show beginning at the end of the month that will focus on summers in Jamestown.

She also recently began showing at a newly opened Wickford gallery called Voila. The galleries mainly exhibit Blair's oils and pastels. Her seascapes are her biggest sellers, she said. But, in the 33 years since she graduated from RISD, Blair has also painted murals



"Drifting" 20x24

on nightclub walls, designed and printed silk screen t-shirts, created theater promotions, and designed web sites.

Recently, she's attracted a young following on deviantART.com, an online community that showcases user-made art, according to its Wikipedia definition.

Her participation on the site began as a desire to pass on her skill to her 14-year-old daughter. But the project grew into a shared endeavor with Blair's daughter requesting specific portraits, mainly of musicians she admires, and Blair drawing them with charcoal.

The resulting work has not only gained the attention of young artists on deviantART, it has also spread across the internet to catch the attention of the musicians themselves and been included in several tour videos and posted on Facebook pages.

Blair discovered the awareness of her work unexpectedly when she and her daughter were at a concert and met the musician, Ryland Blackinton, a guitarist for Cobra Starship.

When Blackinton saw Blair, he knew her immediately, saying, "You made me look so hot."

"That was probably the most fun meeting I've had," Blair said, adding, "You have no idea what your impact on the internet is, which is really a cool thing."

The work is not only fun and easy, she said, it keeps her exposed to what's new in the world, lets her contribute to charities by donating portraits and is a way of giving back.

Like her paintings, Blair tries to capture

something of the nature of the person in her drawings.

"I want to say something about them as people," she said.

But portraits also demand more accuracy than her paintings, a challenge Blair finds exciting.

"Portraits are more exacting and less forgiving. The features have to be right," she said.

These days, half or more of Blair's work is web

"Waiting for the Tide" 14x18





Lotus triptych: 1. pastel "From Primordial Mud" 24x24



2. pastel "The Bloom of Midday" 20x24



3. pastel "Unfolding the Seeds of Immortality" 24x24



Hayley Williams, lead singer of Paramore
(fund-raiser for Two Write Love On Her Arms, www.twloha.com)

design, a skill she picked up by returning to RISD to update her computer skills.

Although she doesn't advertise her web work and doesn't really want it to keep growing, Blair said currently word of mouth advertising is keeping her busy.

She does it not just because she enjoys the process, but also because it lets her help other artists who need support in marketing and promoting their work.

"I like being able to help people. I really enjoy that I can be the bridge to help them," she said.

Still to come, in terms of art work, she said, is a possible exploration of oil portraits, blending her skills in illustration with her oil paintings.

She is also contemplating trying to capture on paper some of the intricate work she creates digitally. Either way, Blair is definitely not at a loss for new avenues to explore. But, she said, with maturity has come an ability to schedule her time better and not overwhelm herself with too many options.

"I try to give the best I can to whatever project I'm doing," Blair said.

"Life is interesting so I keep it open." 80

See more of Blair's work at www.cbastudio.com

pastel "Evening Falls Softly in the Garden of Lost Dreams" 24x30



pastel "Friends" 24x30

