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SCHENECTADY, NY ♦ \$1.00

FRIDAY, AUGUST 12, 2016

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Artist Spotlight: Gerri Moore

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Posted By: [inash](#) August 12, 2016

BY INDIANA NASH

Gazette Reporter

NISKAYUNA- In the fourth grade, Gerri Moore said her father stamped her with what would become her ultimate passion later in life: creating art.

“I went to Woodlawn school and my teacher in fourth grade picked my paintings to be displayed. My father said, ‘Okay, you’re an artist,’” Moore said.

From that small start, Moore grew to love painting, drawing, and any creative work she could get her hands on.

However, before pursuing art full time, Moore attended SUNY Potsdam for a bachelor's degree in education. She taught elementary school for several years. Some of those years were spent in Niskayuna elementary schools before she became a full time mother of her three children: Jimmy, John and Jessica.

Throughout her career and motherhood, Moore continued to work on her art whenever she could and took art workshops and classes locally.

Her husband, Jim, and her parents helped to support Moore's passion by taking care of their three children during the evenings when Moore was away at the various workshops. Family has always been top of mind for Moore, and they remain one of her main biggest inspirations.

Moore's eldest child, Jimmy has a condition similar to Down Syndrome and Jimmy's spirit and his struggles have often been the subject of Moore's work.

"The paintings that I've done of Jimmy are some of my favorite," Moore said.

For years, she photographed her son and some of his friends with similar syndromes.

"They are some of the most interesting people," Moore said.

After attending Jimmy's prom with other students who were mentally handicapped, Moore painted a large diptych of scenes from the evening.

"When I saw Jimmy, I was worried that he wasn't having fun because he was only standing there (at the prom). But when I asked him about it afterwards, he said he loved it and was just so happy about the night," Moore said.

From that experience, Moore painted several large pieces of the prom, depicting how much everyone was enjoying the evening, even though that joy looked different from others.

When Moore was in her early 50s, she went to SUNY Albany to get her masters degree in fine arts.

"Up until that point, I'd been doing a lot of abstract work. But when I got into graduate school I started working more realistically," Moore said.

Going through graduate school was difficult at first, said Moore. In order to be admitted into the school, she had to take a high level drawing class to prove herself. Once she'd passed, she was allowed to take on a full course-load.

Moore said during the first few weeks of classes, although she loved the work, she often would 'leave school at school.'

"After that, I was put on academic probation," Moore said. Immediately after receiving that notice, she spoke with the head of the department and plead for another chance.

"So I had to really think of something thought provoking for my final project," Moore said.

Taking a cue from one of her favorite artists, Balthus, she painted herself in bed with her son Jimmy calling out to her.

This piece impressed her professor, who loved Balthus and thus Moore was quickly taken off probation and was able to finish her degree.

However, Balthus' influence remains important to her work today. On her home studio wall, Moore displays a handwritten quote of Balthus', "Painting is the passage from the chaos of the emotions to the order of the possible."

Distortions mark some of her paintings and those distortions are what, for Moore, create the best pieces.

"I love questioning what's going on in a piece," Moore said.

Moore has been in many art shows over her years as an artist. The two that she strives to be in every year are the Hudson Mohawk Regional and the Cooperstown Regional Art Show.

In Moore's latest show at The Arkell Museum, she exhibited portraits of her grandchildren, among many others.

The show runs until August 17.

However, recently, Moore has dedicated most of her time and talents to another sort of artistic project.

“But I’ve been busy working on panels for the church,” Moore said.

She is a long time member of the St. George’s Episcopal Church in Schenectady and when she arrived for the service one Sunday in 2012, she noticed that some posters hanging on the walls that weren’t very appealing.

After speaking with the church members, she volunteered to paint the 14 stations of the cross.

Since completing that project last year, she’s been asked to paint the stations for another church she attends for half the year in Vero Beach, Florida and another church in Puerto Rico.

While she has enjoyed working on the many panels for the churches, Moore said that simply painting is one of her main passions.

“I don’t know what I would do if I couldn’t do that,” laughed Moore.

After the panels for the church is complete, Moore will be moving onto other pursuits: possibly other portraits of grandchildren or of landscapes.

But as her father declared when Moore was in elementary school, she will always be creating.