

intriguing neighbors



Nancy's "Flag" painting.

NANCY TRACY

In the heart of Old Saybrook, her gallery & studio gives back

BY SUSAN E. CORNELL

In the heart of Old Saybrook, in an artistically designed space one would never believe was once a barn, is the Tracy Art Center, a gallery and studio which has provided hundreds of artists and craftspeople of all ages and skill levels with art shows, workshops and fine art classes. TAC, the Center's moniker, has long been a solid contributor to the arts on the Connecticut shoreline.



Nancy Tracy

Seventeen years ago, Old Saybrook resident Nancy Tracy decided to "give something back" to her community. Tracy moved to the shoreline in 1986 and began to reestablish her artist career. She had been a working artist, showing mostly watercolors and pastels, and doing a little teaching in Cornwall, New York while raising three children. Tracy began to realize that there was a need

for some art instruction here – especially among young people – and so began the Tracy Art Center (TAC) in 1989 in a location on the Post Road in Old Saybrook. There she offered classes for adults and children.

“I began the Center because of my strong desire to help artists, my commitment to the creative process, and my frustration with many of the teaching methods especially with very young artists,” she said. Her support of the arts runs the gamut from promoting the value of art in our society to assisting the individuals who are making art today in our community. Says Tracy, “I have a great interest and love for the artistic accomplishments of mankind throughout the ages – from caveman to today and tomorrow.”

Tracy studied to be an art teacher in the early 60s, and received a BFA from Ohio University. She taught for several years in Ontario, Ohio. After starting a family, she began to study with various artists rather than returning to work. The Tracys moved to Cornwall on Hudson, New York in 1969 and Nancy became very involved with the artists working in the area. She was one of 17 artists who founded the Real Gallery, an artist cooperative in Cornwall. She taught continuing education at Orange County Community College and ran classes at the Museum of Hudson Highlands.

The Art Center, once independently owned by Tracy, underwent steps to become a nonprofit a year and a half ago in order to encourage and assist the community through its programs. “Being nonprofit affords the opportunity to have more community input and support and enables the goals and hopes for the future of TAC to realized,” she explains.

To do so, a steering committee of TAC supporters was formed and the legal process began. This meant creating a board of directors and setting up a volunteer organization. “Most of the work is done by volunteers who work on events, day-to-day running of the classes, member events, artist support groups and workshops,” she says.

The Center’s uniqueness is found in the strong commitment of the board and its executive director both for and to artists. Tracy refers to herself as an “artist’s advocate” and describes TAC as “a place for artists to meet,



Nancy's "Brown" painting.

show art, learn, teach, network, meet the community, support the arts and support new artists, young and older.”

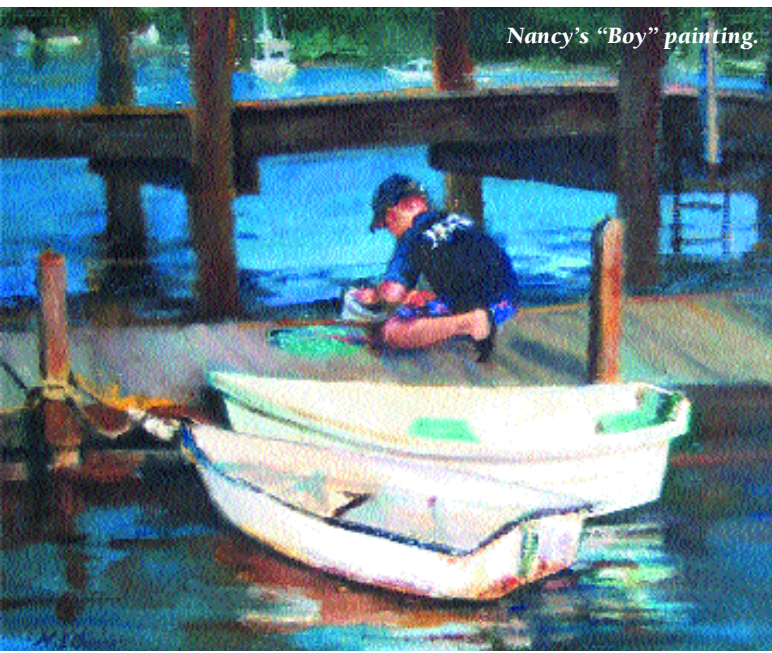
Another distinctive feature is that the Center runs a “Young Artists Program” where children as young as five can begin with a creative art program and then continue for years to come with programs that grow with them – exploring drawing, painting, sculpture, pottery, movie making and cartooning at various levels – all with an opportunity to meet each week for free studio time besides class. In addition, TAC sponsors a scholarship program for children of all ages to attend the art class of their choice. “We gave one full young person’s scholarship in the fall last year and two full scholarships in the spring session,” said Tracy.

The most recent show that proves the Tracy Art Center is not just another gallery or art school was held in July. TAC united with Youth and Family Services and Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth to display a variety of youth art. As Tracy explains, Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth supports and encourages the local businesses, organizations and governments to network and improve communications and support with youth and our community by sponsoring intergenerational programs. Partnering with the organization meshes with TAC’s goals to be an artistic support to the young interested artists of the area.

Classes range from preschool to senior, including workshops for mothers and their children. From pastels, picture book design, pottery, movie making, cartooning, and figure drawing to ultra-fun cartooning, TAC offers something creative for everyone. What is unique about the classes is that they cater to advanced students as well as preschoolers, children, and adults. The Center’s slogan, “Art for Everyone,” does ring true.

But classes are just one element of TAC’s involvement in the community. There are art shows such as Partners in Art which integrates artists with young artists, a juried water show, artist support groups such as “The Paint Gang,” visiting artist workshops, demonstrations, an abstract art group, and neat children’s workshops integrating the art with music, writing, dance and acting. ♦

For more information about classes or volunteer opportunities at the Tracy Art Center, call 860-388-1391 or via email at tracy.art.center@sbcglobal.net.



Nancy's "Boy" painting.