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ARTISAN: Lee W. Glazer

With colored pencils in hand, the fine artist reveals the common humanity that binds us all.

BY PAMELA DITTMER MCKUEN

Artist Lee W. Glazer and a companion were hiking the Atlas Mountains in Morocco when their guide invited them to his mother's home for lunch. They accepted, and he led the way to a dwelling carved into a mountainside. His mother and wife warmly welcomed their unexpected visitors and graciously prepared a meal over an open fire.

The Moroccan women's headscarves and cloaks couldn't shroud their smiles, and the language barrier couldn't encrypt

their hospitality.

Grateful for the simple joys—hiking in nature, sharing a cup of tea—that brought them together from across the globe, Glazer snapped a photograph of her hosts. That photo-



Portrait by Jessica Tampas

graph became the reference for a colored-pencil drawing titled *Everyone Loves Fatima*.

You can view it and more of Glazer's work at *Dusk*, a chic new cocktail lounge and art gallery on the near northwest side of Chicago. Glazer is the gallery curator and a featured artist.

Says Lucia Annunzio, who owns *Everyone Loves Fatima*, "The level of detail in the folds of the dresses, the variations of the same color and the personalities of the two women are executed so beautifully. I saw the original photograph before it became a painting, and she not only replicated the image, but she captured the depth of the image."

"There is a collective unconscious that strives for the same things in life, yet we are so different," Glazer says. "The humanity of it all, I think, is what drives my choices of what I paint or draw."

Glazer, who grew up in Highland Park, has been drawing for as far back as she has memories. Perhaps it's in her genes. Her maternal grandfather was an architect who worked with Daniel Burnham, renowned for skyscrapers and urban planning. Her mother was a fine seamstress. As a small child, Glazer sat with paper and crayons at her mother's feet while she sewed.

After high school, she studied art at the University of Oklahoma and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago before leaving school to work as an illustrator at an advertising studio. In 1972, she enrolled at Barat College in Lake Forest. It was a turning point in her career. There, she studied painting with Ed Paschke, an acclaimed artist associated with the Chicago Imagists. The two maintained a close friendship until his death in 2004.

"Ed Paschke taught me to dig deep with my vision," she says. "He instilled the confidence to run with my instincts and the impetus to reach beyond."



Lee W. Glazer: Mojave Desert

His enthusiasm and the courage to never hold back are still with me in every moment.”

Glazer married and raised a family while continuing her art. She worked in oils until, as a young mother, she became concerned how her children might be affected by the fumes. Searching for another medium that would produce the same depth, she turned to colored pencils. She builds layer upon layer of color with complementary hues underneath, a laborious process that is often mistaken for paint.

Two prestigious galleries declined to represent her because she can't produce fast enough. Still, she has kept busy with commissions, exhibitions, shows and private sales.

“I never learned to market myself,” she says. “I just made art constantly.”

In the late 1990s, she attended a workshop at Anderson Ranch Art Center in Snowmass Village, Colorado, where Paschke was teaching a class in portraiture. She had been focusing on desert landscapes, “a heartthrob of mine,” but under his tutelage, she switched to figural work. For inspiration, she maintains vast files of photographs culled from newspaper clippings and her extensive travels.

“What I'm interested in is how body language and facial expressions reveal so much about how people cope with the unimaginable,” she says. “Sometimes you can look at an image, I can, and see the soul of it. That's what I'm looking for.”

Bert and Frida, for example, shows a forlorn-looking man and his dog sitting together on a yellow floral sofa. The image was sourced from a newspaper article about the man's yearlong struggle to get insurance to pay for his wife's medical tests.

Home of Shared Knowledge, in which a mother helps her daughter with homework, was inspired by a news article about a single mom trying to make ends meet.

Viewers of Glazer's work often insert the word “humanity” into their commentary, as does art collector Philip Rotner.

“She is a fine technical drafts person with a bold, unique style and look,” he says. “All of that works not only visually, but also lends depth to the humanity of her work. You can almost see through the faces, posture and outward attitude of her subjects into something much more profound. I have often wondered what I might learn about myself if she painted me.”

“So much personality comes through her drawings,” says architect Bill Bickford, principal at Northworks Architects + Planners and co-founder of Dusk. “They are not meant to be overly glamorous or fancy but very real depictions of characters you feel you know. Some of them make you laugh, and for some, there's no sympathy, but you definitely feel for the subjects and sense what they are going through.”

A decade ago, Northworks bought a former taxi service garage and renovated it for their Chicago office. A long-held dream was to own a bar where staff, contractors and clients could socialize and where artists and designers could showcase their work. Opportunity arose after buying the building next door, 1518 N. Throop St., and tenant leases ran out. Dusk officially opened to the public in December.

Bickford, with whom Glazer created custom works for various interiors projects, called upon her to curate a rotating collection of art.

Glazer picks up the story: “He said, ‘I've got this really great notion for something I want to do. Do you want to do it with me?’ I said, ‘Heck, yeah!’”

She mounted her own drawings as well as the works of Jeanne Goodman, Gay Held and Barry Wolf. As pieces sell, new ones are put up, and other artists will be invited to participate. The bar is open to the public Wednesday through Sundays. The art is available to view at other times by appointment.

“It's sort of a work in progress,” Glazer says. “For me, I like to be open to whatever comes along.” □



Top: *Everyone Loves Fatima*

Middle: *Home of Shared Knowledge*

Bottom: *Bert and Frida*