

Lake Minnetonka

NOVEMBER 2008

sophisticated living

SHAPING A DREAM

Artist Cathy Bratter touches the world with paint and stone



DANCING WITH A STAR

Professional ballet whirls into Minnetonka with the help of Erik Sanborn

FROM THE HEART

15 great ideas for inspired holiday giving

Contents

LAKE MINNETONKA MAGAZINE // SOPHISTICATED LIVING

NOVEMBER 2008 | VOL. 4 | NO. 7

COVER STORY // **42**
Crafting her Dreams
To Minnetonka sculptor and painter Cathy Bratter, being deaf is far from a disability—it's the gift that allows her to escape into a world of art.



SHORELINES

12 Kaleidoscope
The ubiquitous green vest gets a facelift. Find out how local Girl Scouts represent the next generation of powerful women, and why this is not your Grandma's troop.

14 New to You
Orono author Susie Bazil releases a children's book designed to help kids—and

parents—survive the cold and flu season.

16 StyleInsiders
Successful model-turned-shopkeeper Jessica Hilde offers her advice on shopping in style on Wayzata's Lake Street.

18 Social Lights
Taste of the Lakes. Foshay Soirée. Excelsior Apple Pie.



Golden Delicious //

26 | TASTE From light, flaky pastries to rich, sinful sauces, find out how to use the new generation of creamy and flavorful artisan butters.

Dancing in the Suburbs //

28 | DIVERSIONS The surprising inspiration behind a year of professional dance at the Metropolitan Ballet and Academy in Minnetonka.

Mahogany Beautiful //

32 | LUXE LIVING With its deeply historical influence and imaginative nautical themes, F. Todd Warner's Minnetrista home celebrates the lake in classic style.

Present-ly Perfect //

38 | GIFT GUIDE *Lake Minnetonka Magazine's* quest for distinctive and original gifts from the heart.

COVER PHOTO BY MARSHALL FRANKLIN LONG

IN EVERY ISSUE // 8 LETTERS 10 FROM THE EDITOR 48 CALENDAR 54 FINAL SAY

BY VALERIE ENGLER
PHOTOS BY MARSHALL FRANKLIN LONG

ESCAPE ART

One Minnetonka woman uses her visual senses to create nationally recognized paintings and sculptures

At some point every day, you can find Cathy Bratter downstairs, on her carpet-less floor, working on a masterpiece. Light bounces off the stacks of painted canvases, and a tray of messy oil paints stands waiting for use. After changing into her button-down shirt—a raggedy smock stained with splashes of color—Bratter pulls on a pair of purple gloves. She uses her hands to spread bright colors onto an already painted canvas. Then, she slips quickly into her own world full of creativity and imagination.

Though her studio is a riot of color and textures, it is oddly silent. She

doesn't need music playing to mute the distractions of everyday life—she creates works of visual beauty for a world that she cannot hear.

ODD GIRL OUT

Born in Saint Paul, Bratter, now 56 years old, didn't discover her love for sculpture and painting until she reached high school. "I think I was the first girl in Saint Paul that was allowed to take industrial arts instead of home economics," Bratter says with a laugh. "That's why I'm not very domestic, I guess."

In a classroom full of boys at Highland Park Senior High, Bratter





IN HER HOME

Displayed for visitors to see, Cathy Bratter's favorite piece of art work is an 8-foot by 6-foot painting that she named "Eggplant." "My favorite paintings change every day," Bratter says. "But today it's 'Eggplant.' It symbolizes depth and simplicity."

Today, Bratter is a master at reading lips and occasionally relies on an FM Assisted Listening Device to help her understand others better. And, thanks to cell phone technology, text messaging gives her a way to chat back and forth with friends. "[It's] has been a blessing in disguise," Bratter says of her hearing. "If you hurt your left leg, your right leg will get stronger. Because I don't have my hearing, my visual sense and my means of communicating make me feel more in touch."

HER PATH

After graduating high school in 1970, Bratter went to the University of Colorado-Boulder

kept to herself, focusing only on her welding. "I've always felt comfortable in situations that are separate," Bratter says. "But I can fit in anywhere."

Her quiet, diligent work quietly and diligently yielded Bratter her first real work of art. Now, that high school sculpture rests in her sunroom. Named "Man and Woman," it's a tiny reminder of how her passion for sculpting began.

SIGHT AND SOUND

Bratter always has found painting and sculpting to be a soothing hobby, but it also gives the artist, who is deaf, a much-needed outlet for self-expression. Since the beginning of her life,

Bratter has struggled to hear. When she was first learning to speak, speech therapy helped her to understand words and sentences. But it was nearly two decades before anyone learned how profound her hearing loss was. "My hearing impairment was progressive since I was born," she says. "But it was undetected until I was in college, so I always found other ways of communicating and expressing myself."

Once she discovered that she was legally deaf, a weight lifted from Bratter's shoulders. "My hearing impairment began to affect my speech and made school very difficult," she says. "So when I found out that there was a legitimate reason for my struggles, I felt really smart."



PROFOUND INSPIRATION > Cathy Bratter is looking to get some of her artwork commissioned in area public spaces.



STUDIO SPACE > Artwork like this piece portraying a hug is sculpted in one room of Cathy Bratter's home, then she steps out to her patio for finishing and polishing stone.

“BECAUSE I DON’T HAVE MY HEARING, MY VISUAL SENSE AND MY MEANS OF COMMUNICATING MAKE ME FEEL MORE IN TOUCH.”

—CATHY BRATTER

to fine-tune her artistic skills. During her first visit home for spring break, an envelope appeared on her dinner plate one night. It was from her father, and it contained an “around the world” airplane ticket. Bratter spent the next year traveling with her parents and brothers, Jimmy and Steven. She toured 43 countries before returning home, when she transferred to the University of Minnesota to complete her degree. By 1974, she was a college graduate with a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Six years later, Bratter married and began a family. By 1987 she was a mother of three daughters—Maggie, Lindsay and Hayley. And though she was still in love with her art work, she found a day job selling advertising for local radio stations.

Hungry to learn more about art, and almost 10 years after graduating, Bratter went back to the University of Minnesota. This time, she

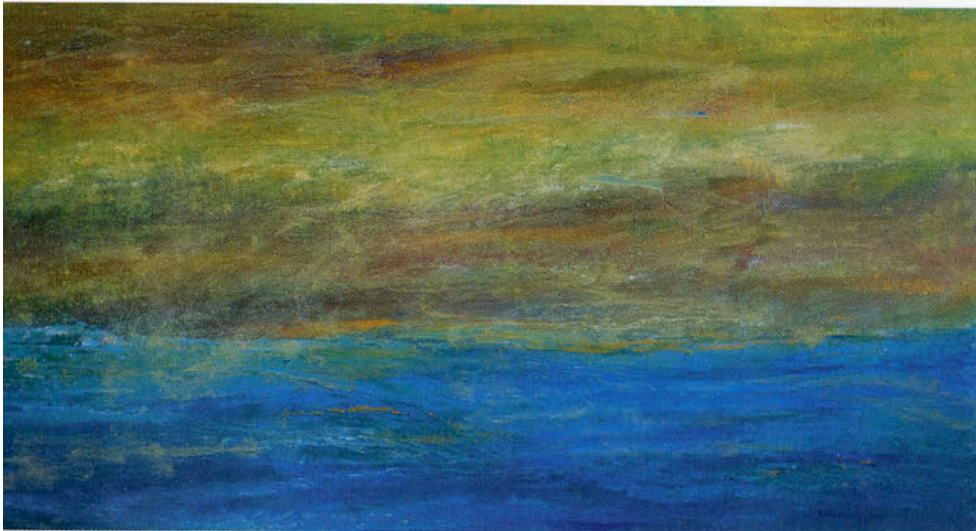
took graduate classes to hone in on her sculpting and painting skills. She also discovered the Minnetonka Center for the Arts, where she took stone sculpting classes. But it was a trip to the East Coast that plotted a vision of an art career in her mind.

“I remember being in New York and seeing an artist working and living in his studio,” Bratter says. “I left there thinking that someday I would live like that.”

After separating from her husband in 1995, Bratter moved into a small townhome only a few blocks away from her previous house. It was a fresh start, and when her last daughter, Hayley, left for college, her world began to transform. “When my kids left, I ripped out the carpet in the basement and my home became my work space,” Bratter says. “I have one room for sculpture and painting, and I use my patio for finishing and polishing stone.”

Prepare your heart and home...





BLANK CANVAS > Lately, Cathy Bratter has been experimenting with a modern twist on landscapes, of which this is one.

A THOUSAND LAYERS

In the middle of a stairway that leads to Bratter's lower level, a large colorful canvas hangs on the center wall. From a distance,

the canvas looks like it was splashed with hundreds of colors. Looking closer, it's clear that Bratter infuses sculpture into her paintings.

SEE FOR YOURSELF //
Bratter's work is on display
at the following locations:

Locally

- # Temple Israel, Minneapolis
- # Blue Cross Blue Shield building, Saint Paul
- # Courage Center, Minneapolis
- # Great River Energy Center, Maple Grove

Nationally

- # Saint Louis Rams' Headquarters, St. Louis, Miss.
- # Coda Gallery, Palm Desert, Calif.
- # Sagamore Collection, Miami Beach, Fla.

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“ART COMES THROUGH ME LIKE A VESSEL, [AND] I’M JUST ALONG FOR THE RIDE.”

—CATHY BRATTER

She begins each piece by splashing oil paint onto a blank canvas. Over time—and after thousands of layers of paint have been applied—Bratter changes its look. Using a sculpting tool, she chisels a layer of paint away. Underneath, another color reveals itself. It’s this kind of transformation that Bratter loves. “My best work comes when I’m not attached to any one outcome,” Bratter says. “Art comes through me like a vessel, [and] I’m just along for the ride.”

LIVING HER DREAM

Each morning, Bratter wakes up and knows that she is finally living her life to the fullest. Her paintings are commissioned all over the Twin Cities. Visit the Ivy Hotel, and you’ll see her canvases in the lobby. Swing by the Marquette Plaza building and you’ll see her work again. She is a full-time artist and knows that she has found her knack. “There is never enough time in the day when I’m in my creative world,” Bratter says. “Art is my peace. I feel like I’m never done.” [LM](#)

Valerie Engler is a contributing editor for Lake Minnetonka Magazine

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