

art and the city

BY JIM MAGNER

A Capitol Hill artist and writer, Jim can be reached at arttandtheCity05@aol.com

Artist Profile: mary BELCHER

This is all about the nature of Place—of observations, seen and unseen. Mary Belcher's paintings are "straightforward," sure, but they also have the journalist's skill in giving you the story behind the story—the intangibles that make the tangibles real. Her work is often described as "realistic," and it is, but it's precise without being prissy; she holds on to the fun of the place while giving you lots of information.

Giving information has been her life. Her first degree was in photography and her second was in journalism. She was a reporter for the Washington Times from '84 -'89 and press spokesman and editor for the Iran-Contra Affair. She approaches painting—all in watercolor—in the same way. She collects information: the history behind a place, what goes on there, and the little subtle details that tell the whole story.

Her recent painting of the firemen at the Eastern Market during the fire provides clues of what happened and the effects of heat and smoke that most others would miss. She also tells the story of the fire through the body language of the people who fought it—it tells their story and the story of the fire at the same time.

Her painted pictorial maps and streetscapes are in many collections in town, including the Nature Conservancy and the new US Forest Service visitor center on the mall.

Mary Belcher paints for the joy of it and sells those works, as originals, prints and cards, at the Historic Eastern Market on Capitol Hill on Sundays. She also takes commissions to paint your house or other favorite Washington place. To get more information, www.marybelcher.com.

Jim Magner's Thoughts on Art

Getting creative is not on your list? You know the list I'm talking about—the conveyor belt of things to do—the never-ending chronicle of the petty tasks



Watercolor painter Mary Belcher at work.



TOP: Neptune Fountain, Library of Congress, watercolor on paper.
RIGHT: Eastern Market entrance, watercolor on paper.



of survival. You're like Chaplin's Little Tramp in "Modern Times," racing to keep up...obsessively tightening the bolts that hold your existence together.

But do they really? Miss a couple of bolts and see what happens. Too frightening? If you don't drop off the clothes at the cleaners, back up your latest files, buy the teacher a present, make the haircut appointment, or find out what the weird little recurring charge on the Visa is, will your life crumble like Miss Havisham's wedding cake?

Think so? Do you dare enter on your list: write a poem, draw something, or start a short story? Is all of that superfluous—just hopeless fluff—the last to be entered and the first to be cut?

A couple of years ago, I looked in the mirror and said, "Magner, you idiot, what are you living for? To keep insurance companies happy? To drive a better car? To cut the grass? NO! Paint more. Write more. Do the petty things afterwards." Now I do. It's like having dessert first—which I certainly do—and the bolts of necessity somehow manage to get tightened.

I still look in the mirror and say, "Magner, you idiot." But now it is about the quality of art, not the quantity.

At the Galleries

Art of the Emerging, Galerie Myrtis, 500 9th St. SE, Through Sept. 3

You still have a couple of days to see "Art of the Emerging," a group exhibit of contemporary art by seven "emerging" artists, including painting, prints, photography and sculpture. www.galleriemyrstis.com.

"Useless", Project 4, 903 U St. NW, Through Sept. 8

"Useless could be a commentary on the essential nature of art. It lacks a function—a use—and as such a compelling need. So what if useful things, like chairs, were to be deliberately designed to be useless? Does that make it art? "Or simply a subversive Act?" You decide, but it looks like art to me. www.project4gallery.com.

Introductions 3, Irvine Contemporary, 1412 14th St. NW, Through Sept. 8

Introductions 3 marks the third year that Irvine Contemporary is presenting eleven recent graduates of

art schools selected nationally. Over 250 artists from 60 art colleges were considered. The work on exhibit and for sale spans a wide range of media, technique and subject matter. www.irvinecontemporary.com.

Summer Impressions, Results Gallery, Results the Gym, 315 G St. SE, Through Sept. 12

"Summer Impressions" includes 60 oil paintings by the Potomac River 9, artists working with Robert Vander Zee in Old Town, Alex. Exclusively landscape and still life, the painters have a broad range of experiences and some are well known in the area. www.fishergallery.com.

Gidey Gezahey, Evolve Property Management, 1375 Maryland Ave. NE, Pierce School Loft, -Sept. 24

Gidey Gezahey is an Ethiopian artist now living in Charlottesville, VA. His oil paintings create an imagery of both the agonies survived and joys discovered as he escaped brutal conflicts and gradually made his way to the country to celebrate the peace and freedom so rare in Eritrea and other places he has lived. www.evolveLLC.com.

Art League Sculptors, Washington Square, 1050 Connecticut Ave. NW, Through November 2

This is the Art League's annual sculpture exhibit at Washington Square. The exhibition includes 32 3-dimensional works by Art League artists, instructors and members of the Torpedo Factory Artist's Assoc. A number of figurative pieces are included and most are for sale. www.theartleague.org.

Virginia Vineyards, The Art League Gallery, 105 N. Union St., (Torpedo Factory Art Center), Alexandria, VA, Sept. 6—Oct. 1

This is Linda Lawler's solo exhibit of paintings of the vineyards of Virginia, capturing the serenity of the vast spaces at varying times of the day. WWW.TheArtLeague.org.

Ice Stories, Hillyer Art Space, 9 Hillyer Ct. SE, Sept. 7—Oct. 25

"Ice Stories by Lisa Sheirer" is a series in which photographs are taken of natural landscapes through ice-coated windows and are then manipulated into abstract compositions and printed on watercolor paper. Reception: Sept. 7, 6-8. www.artsandartists.com/artspace. ■



Amy Bormet at her piano

Amy Bormet: A Hill Girl Gets Down

By MONICA CAVANAUGH

Amy Bormet was in the first grade when she started sounding out tunes. Like most kids her age, she played a lot of instruments but was good at almost none. It was the piano, though, that stole her attention for the rest of the years to come.

Not content to let her hobby fall to the wayside, Bormet took her talent across town to Duke Ellington School for the Performing Arts. While there she studied with the celebrated Davey Yarborough, played with the school's jazz band and even formed her own trio.

"I don't like playing by myself," says Bormet of her particular genre. "And I like boys. I started in musical theater but realized it was all girls. There are lots of boys in jazz."

She's kidding, sort of, but her silly outward persona is only a cover for an immensely talented pianist, songwriter and singer.

Bormet attended the University of Michigan with the help of two prestigious scholarships, one directly from Ellington. While there, she got back into the swing of performing right away.

"I played in everything," she says. "I played piano in a jazz band...I had my own Nat King Cole type group with guitar, base, piano and vocals."

After four years of studying under prestigious musicians like Ellen Rowe and Geri Allen, Bormet graduated in 2002 with a degree in jazz piano performance.

Once back home in Northeast Capitol Hill, Bormet wasted no time in getting out on the town and in front of a crowd.

Again she formed a trio, this time named for her, and began getting gigs in restaurants and jazz clubs around town. She'll go anywhere, she says on her Web site, as long as there's a piano and good acoustics. Investing in a portable keyboard, she made it that much easier for people to book her for private parties as easily as weddings and bar mitzvahs.

To fill her time between gigs, Bormet has also taken up teaching, most recently with the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop. There she has six private piano and voice lessons a week, all with adults who aspire to pound those keys with the best of them. When she isn't there, she's

working with the Washington Jazz Arts Institute, where she's spent the past three summers teaching high school students.

At 23 years old, Bormet has covered a lot of ground already. Even in high school she was outdoing most of us, playing shows at the White House. "I stole some paper towels from the bathroom because I thought they were awesome," she says boldly. "And they had super delicious White House cookies. I highly recommend White House parties."

Bormet clearly values fun and finds that jazz is a perfect way to combine the two. "A lot of the people I play with are my friends," she says, "so the interaction is great. Getting to play for four hours with my friends is just awesome."

That's not to say that she doesn't take what she does seriously. Despite her laidback confidence, to see Bormet at the piano is a forceful experience. It's so wonderfully natural that you can't imagine that at one point in her life she was pushing through "You Are My Sunshine" like every other 8-year-old.

Her style and performance is so strong, in fact, that after playing in an open jam session at jazz club HR-57 on 14th Street, Bormet was asked to be their house piano player. Now she plays every other Thursday, sitting pretty as she hosts new open mic hopefuls.

Constantly on the go with private and public gigs all over town, Bormet is still planning to sit down and record an album sometime in the fall. Actually, she's planning a lot of things: more songwriting, grad school and even a jaunt down to Brazil to study their jazz culture.

So what does she sound like?

"Say I'm sultry. I've always wanted to be called sultry," she says with a straight face betrayed by a hint of laughter. "I have hip people tell me I sound like Blossom Dearie, but most people see me as a punky brunette who plays the piano, and they go 'do you know Norah Jones?' Don't get me wrong, she's cute and all, but that's just not my thing."

She may not be as tame as Jones, but like that famous songstress, Bormet's voice will catch your ear, her playing will get under your skin, and you will remember this girl.

To check out Amy's music and upcoming gigs, or to contact her, visit www.amykbormet.com. ■