

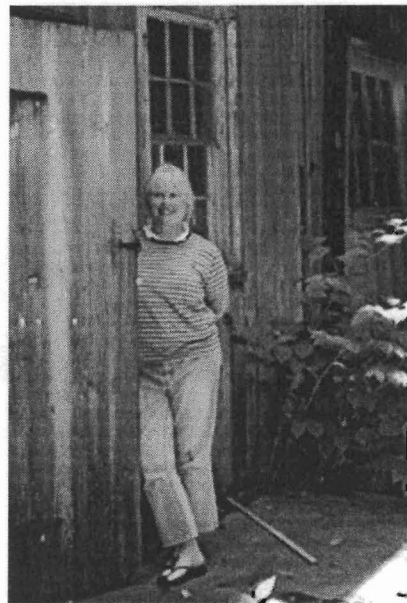
## **DENISE REGAN: An Artist Comes Full Circle**

By Joanne Pilgrim

The long ride down the dirt road through the forest to Denise Regan's Shelter Island house and studio, with glimpses of the bay through stands of trees, feels a bit like a narrow traverse between the real world and that of Ms. Regan's paintings: a colorful dream landscape washed with whimsy.

Many of her most recent oil paintings are of the view from the land where Ms. Regan and her husband of two years, John Picker, live, among a string of historic cottages alongside the 2,000-some-acre Mashomack Preserve.

The paintings - called "sophisticated primitive" by Morgan Rank, at whose gallery she used to show - are layered with metallic underpaint and glaze, "so the layers come up - little surprises," Ms. Regan said. "That way it doesn't get static. It gives a kind of life to it. In different light, it looks different."



The subjects of works in a one-woman show at the Pamela Williams Gallery in Amagansett, which closed Monday - "Summer Light," "Red Sunrise," "Morning Treescape," or "Blue Bird on a Beach," depict not only Ms. Regan's environment, but the way she sees it.

Women, in particular, "have to be optimistic and give more happiness into the world," Ms. Regan said, particularly in light of wars and world events.

Ms. Regan, who was born on Ellis Island in New York Harbor, where her father was in the medical corps, made summer visits to East Hampton and Montauk as a child, and later, she said, "basically grew up as an artist out here."

She earned a master's degree in fine arts at New York University, where she studied with both "close-up realists" such as Chuck Close, who is still a friend, and with conceptual artists such as Jose Monta-a and second-generation Abstract Expressionists like Athos Zacharias.

In 1977, she was invited by Arnold Hoffmann Jr. to work in his screenprinting workshop in Springs, where many of the well-known contingent of New York and South Fork artists - James Brooks, Willem de Kooning, Esteban Vicente, and Lee

Krasner among them - were clients.

"I had a lot of grandparents," Ms. Regan said of those years. "I really had a lot of significant people around me. It was a wonderful experience."

Craig Claiborne, a friend of Mr. Hoffmann's, came over to prepare lunches, and there were Monday night potlucks at which the artists would get together after working all day. Now, Ms. Regan said, "I'm trying to welcome younger people as much as I can, too."

From Mr. Hoffmann and Mr. Close, she said, she learned a kind of "due diligence" in painting. "They are real craftsmen - really into the process of working. I like to think a lot of that rubbed off. I come into my studio and work eight hours a day. And there's always order."

She also met Ilya Bolotowsky, a Constructivist painter whose use of color and geometry influenced Ms. Regan. "I kind of chose that as my original path," she said. "It's very abstract - it dealt with lines and color."

Eventually, she said, "I gave up the masking tape," and began to break out of the confines of "that really hard edge" of geometric lines, angles, and pure fields of color.

On a trip to Europe, after attending the opera in Vienna, she walked outside and saw a one-ring circus set up across the street. "It had a red tent," she said. "It was almost like a light hit me."

"It just opened up my whole life. I gave up the masking tape and I did a whole circus series." A red horse figure became "sort of an icon," she said, and appeared in sculptural form as well as in paintings, and in the images she made to go with "Red Sun: A Musical Fable," a proposal for an animated film that she was asked to contribute to after one of its authors saw her work.

Viewing the work of European painters such as Gustav Klimt had an effect as well. "It opened me up to just relax and really paint from my heart, rather than just by technique alone."

Now, she is doing "my mature work," she said. "It's gone full circle," incorporating the "very simple concepts" of her early Constructivist-style paintings - "the simplicity of my early work" - with "the overlays and paint strokes of my later work."

"I'm so influenced by the world around me. I wake up to the water, go to sleep to the water, the sun rises over the water, and sets over the water. . . . Watching the water is like the circus that day. It was that magical moment, becoming that involved in something."

Ms. Regan and Mr. Picker, a photographer, share a roomy studio with space for each to work and a storage area for their own works, and those they've collected.

There is a flat file full of her paintings on rice paper, a medium, she said, "that's been my bread and butter for years," and a piece she made in the sixth grade which has a

similar mix of sophistication and naivete.

Her work is in numerous private, public, and corporate collections worldwide, including that of the United States State Department.

A series of paintings based on a poem by Siv Cedering, also a friend, were imprinted on glass and mounted in a 5-by-100-foot mural in the University of Chicago Children's Hospital.

"In the house," Ms. Regan said, "eventually I paint everything." For example, she said, "dishes and bathroom walls. My family says, if it doesn't move, I'll paint it."

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