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Traill Works





The Art of Jennie Traill Schaeffer

Halos and Pearls

Newton, NJ } “Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” This quote is attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson and was given to Jennie Traill Schaeffer in a birthday card from her grandmother. The sentiment has stuck with her.

“Traill is a family name going back to a Scottish ancestor in colonial Easton, PA, named Robert Traill, who was supposed to sign the Declaration of Independence for Easton but didn’t.” Schaeffer says, “I used Traill in my business name because people always remembered it. They remarked about the name’s significance when I shared the quote with them.”

Raised in a creative family from Easton, PA—her father plays guitar and her mother makes jewelry—Schaeffer traces the roots of her art to her parents. While an adolescent she took private lessons with a local artist, Nancy Bossert, and realized, “This is it!” Her course in visual arts was set.

“In that first period I finally had somebody who modeled a lot of my views about being an artist. She was working out of her home. She was a professional artist. She was teaching. And she had kids—she was doing it all. I thought, ‘Wow! This is amazing!’” Bossert helped Schaeffer develop the portfolio that was key for her entrance into college.

While attending Syracuse University’s College of Visual and Performing Arts, Schaeffer took a dual major in painting and arts education. While there, she was a student of the noted American figurative painter Jerome Witkin, who encouraged her to pursue painting. She also studied abroad, traveling to Florence, Italy.

In her attempts to develop a career as an artist, Schaeffer faced the challenges of making an income. She held a teaching position for a couple of years but found that it took time away from painting. She worked briefly at a retail job in an art supply store when her husband, Lee Goldberg, suggested that she treat her art as a career. She did a lot of research about starting a business, and in 2005 she registered her business name as Traillworks.

Her month-long residency at Peters Valley Craft Center in 2008 was a turning point for Schaeffer because it showed her the importance of having a space to paint in. She was

able to paint large canvases there. This launched her onto a journey through a number of rented spaces and brought her to the current location on Spring Street in Newton, NJ. Along with holding private and group art lessons in the space, Schaeffer utilizes part of it for her painting studio.

TraillWorks is located in a beautifully restored Victorian residence in the heart of town. It is Schaeffer’s gallery and studio space. Along with her own bright, bold paintings, Schaeffer exhibits the works of other artists and craft artisans in her stylish upscale space.

During visits to TraillWorks, we spoke about her work, the development of her career and Schaeffer’s activities in the community. Content and meaning are important in her work. Schaeffer seeks to validate her pursuit of art as something worth devoting her life to.

“All of my kitchen-based artwork comes from a discussion I had with my husband over chores. It brought up notions of gender roles and responsibilities in a marriage. It even goes back to things about my art and is connected to how I was raised and to what my role is as a wife, as a mother, and as a woman living in the 21st century.”

In 2010, with one of her exhibiting artists Martha C. Hall, Schaeffer hosted an apron-sharing event at which participants were invited to bring their aprons and to tell their stories. “It was really interesting to hear all of the history that went with their individual aprons, whether it was familial things or aprons that had been passed down through generations,” she remembers.

Schaeffer has added layers to her exploration of the personal meaning behind the symbols of domesticity. Her paintings of coffeepots, mixers, Cosco chairs, blenders, irons, etc. convey a humorous as well as a nostalgic sense. “I was made aware of how home appliances are marketed and seen as icons. I see them as modern-day icons.”

Linking these with the Maestá (Italian for majestic) paintings of Early Renaissance masters, Schaeffer created literal transpositions of their works. A mixer and eggbeater or pair of coffee percolators stands in for the “Madonna with Child,” the Cosco or womb chair for the throne, and aprons for the tapestry. These re-interpretations are directly referenced through the halos placed over the appliances. [continued on next page](#)

In recent works, such as *The Lucky One*, numinous qualities emerge in the transcendent luster of pearls. Below the paint, Schaeffer has applied broken eggshells, creating a textured mosaic-like effect. In *Cooking up a Pearl* the cooker's wire becomes the string for the pearls that lead to an eggcup, out of which a large pearl appears.

Schaeffer's works, which combine radical technique with contents that bring together mundane and sacred objects, are intriguing and are due for watching. In the classes at the studio, Schaeffer helps the students develop a sense of vision. She references known artists and teaches technique. "As a teacher," she says, "I believe deeply that my students' work should not be carbon copies of my own."

She assists students in developing their portfolios for entrance into art school. Schaeffer acknowledges the need to show them how to develop an art career and the different possibilities in marketing their talent. On a recent outing, she took a group of adult students to a local tattoo parlor. The proprietor, who had attended art school, spent an hour with them.

Schaeffer is actively tending to her gallery, offering the works of her exhibiting artists for sale, including her mother's jewelry, setting up exhibitions, holding life-drawing studios and teaching her students. She is working on a commissioned biblical-themed mural for St. Joseph's Elementary School in Newton. She is also preparing for her work to be shown at the Noyes Museum of Art at Stockton College in Oceanville, NJ, in an exhibition entitled *Feast for the Eyes*, opening September 14th, 2012.

Much like the modeling of her first teacher, Jennie Traill Schaeffer is "doing it all." She is a professional artist, a teacher, and for her 3-year-old son, Joel, she is Mom. This is nothing short of "Wow! And Amazing!" ●

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To learn more about Schaeffer's gallery and upcoming exhibitions, please visit www.TraillWorks.com.

Michael Hartnett is an artist and writer with a studio located in Stanhope, NJ. He is the author of *Tales of Allamucha*, a nature fantasy novel available soon.