

# The Life-Affirming Art of Judy Stach

by Paul Soderberg

In art circles, it is traditional to describe artists by who they studied with, which shows and exhibitions they've been in, which art publications have publicized them, which art groups they are members of, and which collections include their work. New Jersey/Florida oil painter Judy Stach can definitely be described that way—but not accurately, since her hallmark as an artist is the life-affirming nature of her art.

Stach certainly has all those traditional "credentials." She has studied with, and been praised by, the living legends of American Realism, including Richard Schmid, David Leffel, Timothy R. Thies, Albert Handel, and Nancy Guzik. Her paintings have appeared in scores of shows, including American Impressionist Society juried shows in Florida and New Mexico, and her art has been featured in dozens of national publications, including *Fine Art Connoisseur* and *The Artist's Magazine*. She is also profiled in the 2008 edition of *Who's Who in American Art* (as well as in the 2008 edition of *Who's Who in America*).

As to art groups, Judy Stach is not merely a member of important ones, like the Oil Painters of America and the Salmagundi Club—she also founded an art group herself, the Plein Air Painters of the Jersey Coast, which she began in 2004 with 3 members and which now has 90 members. And Stach's paintings hang in numerous prestigious collections from Florida to Maryland to Virginia to Idaho to California.

But all those traditional credentials do not begin to describe this artist accurately, because Judy Stach's art goes far beyond her canvases, extending into, and beautifying, countless lives. With paints and brushes, she tries to solve painting's eternal problems of

color and tone, light and shadow; and with kindness and compassion, she tries to solve some of life's eternal problems, helping those who have cancer, for example, or dyslexia.

She is an artist when she's holding a paintbrush, in other words, and she is also an artist when she's holding a hurting person's hand.

In addition to showing her own works in traditional art shows, Judy has organized fellow artists to raise money for cancer research, and she has hosted art shows to benefit the Jacqueline M. Wilentz Comprehensive Breast Center at the Monmouth Medical Center (NJ). She also organized a show, "Alex's Lemonaid Stand," to benefit the fight against childhood cancer, and most recently organized an art show for the James Parker Family Health Clinic, a free clinic for those who lack medical insurance.

To this life-affirming artist, "spiritual medicine" includes living works of art. In fact, she also "paints" beauty in people's lives with flowers—to the extent that those who know her sometimes fondly call her "the Flower Lady." Years ago, observing that there was "too much blacktop" at the Monmouth Beach Bath and Tennis Club, she took it upon herself to plant beautiful hydrangeas all around the parking lot, plus a few perennial gardens.

Disney World in Orlando holds a spectacular annual *Flower and Garden Festival*, and three times Judy has been among the dozen or so leading flower painters in America to paint plein-air at that festival, viewed by literally millions of people.

According to Debbie Schweers of Veranda Fine Art and Gift Gallery, in Fair Haven, NJ, "Although she is famous for her flowers, Judy Stach, a native of the Jersey Shore, also has an especially great love of water. I see this great love in her work very clearly, as do my clients. Judy can paint anything, though, and has been an invited plein-air artist to the Rumson Garden Tour for the past two years. I am extremely pleased to

have her as a nationally recognized and award-winning artist, and she truly is a significant part of my gallery and of the community."

At all times, whether in the midst of great admiring crowds at Disney World or in galleries, or alone in the great outdoors, Judy Stach paints only what inspires her. What inspires her is life and light—and the light of life, which is goodness and peace. "I focus more on the light of day than on nocturnal scenes," she says, "because I feel more a part of life in the light than in darkness.

"I believe," she continues, "that an artist has a responsibility to her viewers, to present to them paintings that will be pleasing, inspiring, and uplifting—that will make them joyful to be alive in this world so full of wonders. The worst thing you could ever do as an artist would be to paint a picture that made its viewers feel cheated, or depressed, or ambushed by negative, life-denying things."

With that life-affirming mindset, Stach finds her greatest joy in painting "peoplescapes," which are landscapes or seascapes featuring people at peace with Nature and with each other. Master painter and teacher Timothy R. Thies has said, "Judy's love of water is evident, as is her passion for light that fills each work." Those two passions, water and light, coupled with Judy's preference and passion for seeing the essential goodness of life, are the hallmarks of her life-affirming art.

Again, that art is not confined to her canvases—it also beautifies the lives of those around her. According to Elva Brusca, owner of the Lambertville Gallery of Fine Art, "Judy isn't just loved by collectors—she's also tremendously loved and admired by other artists because she's always so generous and helpful to everyone who loves art." Or, in the words of painter Anthony Ventura: "Beyond her enormous talent, Judy is, very simply, a great person."

That personal and professional greatness was, and is, built on these five qualities.

**Kindness.** "I always drew as a child," Judy says, "because I wanted to make people happy by drawing and painting pictures for them. My grandfather was a boat-builder and I grew up playing at his boat yard each weekend, and it was the most natural thing for me to then start to draw and paint boats."

**Faith.** "I start every day in prayer. God is indeed the most powerful of artists. His paintings and color combinations are lessons I seek to learn every waking hour. The ultimate challenge for an artist, and the greatest satisfaction, is to see and capture places and manmade objects and people that are naturally existing together beautifully. It's like seeing Humanity and God in harmony."

**Hard Work, Energy, and Enthusiasm.** A renowned artist/teacher: "Many years ago, Judy happened to see some of my works in a gallery. It was like they released an incredible force in her, because she had a tremendous natural instinct for painting, which I saw as soon as she became a student. But it wasn't just her natural ability—it was also her determination and her enthusiasm. I've taught art for nearly 50 years, and she is probably the hardest worker of all the students I've ever had. And the more she learned, the more enthusiastic she became. We still paint together, and sometimes I find myself wishing I could somehow just tap into her energy and enthusiasm."

Again, Judy's life-affirming mindset, empowered by those five qualities to create her artworks, also finds expression in living things. "I love to see things grow. If I'm not painting, I'm gardening. But those activities are very much alike, in the sense that the greatest purpose of artworks is to relay a message of hope and peace, and to brighten the world for all who view them. In that sense, great paintings are just like flower gardens.

"Life," she continues, "is precious and a constant wonder, and the happiest people on Earth are those who realize that, because they don't waste it. That's why I consider artists to be the luckiest people in the world: what we make—the world speaking to our soul, and then our soul speaking through paint to the souls of total strangers who view our paintings—is a message of hope and gratitude."

The bottom line, that "message," is that a painting by this life-affirming artist is itself life-affirming—and for that reason is an almost therapeutic addition to any home. Years ago Judy had her own interior design firm, Inside Out Design, and she retains a design expert's sense for creating strikingly beautiful and soothing living spaces. As Elva Brusca put it, "People just love Judy's paintings in their homes, especially for their sense of calm, their serenity."

That hallmark of all her paintings for the past four decades remains Judy Stach's quintessential and ultimate goal: "I have a dream painting that is my life goal as an artist. I don't yet know what the subject matter will be, but I already have the title, *Through the Eyes of God*. My dream is for that one painting to inspire perfect peace in anyone who views it."

Until she completes and shows that masterwork of her career, you can view her peace-inducing, life-affirming paintings the Meghan Chandler Gallery (Vero Beach, Florida), the Lambertville Gallery of Fine Art (Lambertville, New Jersey), the Veranda Fine Art and Gift Gallery (Fair Haven, NJ), the Main Street Gallery (Manasquan, NJ), the Frederick Gallery (Springlake, NJ), and the Guild of Creative Art (Shrewsbury, NJ).

If those galleries are too far for you to drive to, drop in on her website, [www.judystach.com](http://www.judystach.com).