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BONNIE KELSO: A natural painter

Summerlin-area abstract artist has love for outdoors, on and off canvas

By JAN HOGAN
VIEW STAFF WRITER

Her inspirations come from nature -- the highly venomous brown snake of Australia, a cougar lying in wait in Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, colorful sea sponges on the ocean floor. But the interpretations of the intertwined forms are left up to the viewer.



jenna dosch/VIEW Bonnie Kelso works on a painting inside her studio at her home. One of the places where she finds inspiration is Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area.

For example, one of her paintings, titled "Fall," shows the water-polished walls of a slot canyon she once explored.

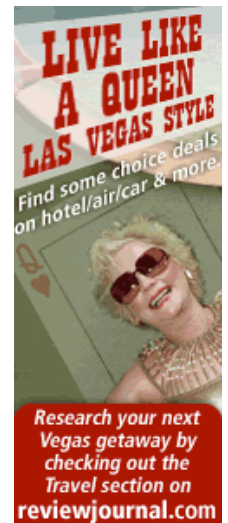
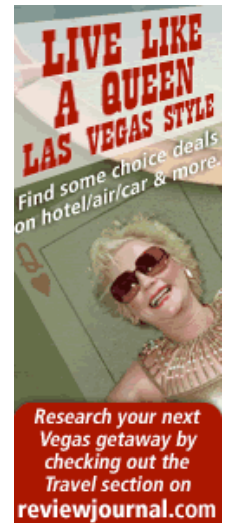


"One woman was sure it was chocolate," Summerlin-area artist Bonnie Kelso said.

jenna dosch/View Bonnie Kelso uses mainly acrylic paints for her artwork, but sometimes includes charcoal and other mediums to create layers in her pieces.

However one interprets them, Kelso's abstract art will be part of the prestigious international art show, ArtExpo, to be held this weekend at the Mandalay Bay Convention Center. Hours are noon to

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6 p.m. on Friday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

"I went to it last year as a spectator, and I was impressed," she said. "And I was happy to see pieces that were (different from) mine."

Kelso not only paints nature. She lives it. The 37-year-old kayaks, hikes, camps, rides a mountain bike, scuba dives, rock climbs and enjoys canyoneering.



She said she likes living near Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area as it has numerous hikes and rock climbing routes to explore. What is it about the outdoors that draws her to it?

"It's inspiring," she said. "It feeds your soul."

Her husband, Ron Graham, shares her passion for the outdoors. They met when she signed up for a hike he was leading and were married this year at Red Springs, on the east side of Red Rock Canyon.

Their honeymoon took them to Machu Picchu, a pre-Columbian Inca site located in Peru, and they also hiked a 19,000-foot peak created by a volcano.

He said that he didn't appreciate abstract painting until he saw it through her eyes.

"We'll be out hiking, and she'll stop and take out her sketch book all the time," he said. "We'll discuss something, and it'll show up (as a) painting six months later."

One of the works hung in her home studio shows a frog on a lily pad painting. It's from when she was 5.

"My mom had it framed for me," she said.

But it is another small painting that she said she treasures the most. It was done in 2001 and marked a change in her career direction -- leaving her job as a exhibit designer for entities such as the Smithsonian museums, National Geographic Society, the Eisenhower Presidential Library and the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, to pursue her art full time.

"I call it 'Beginnings,' and I kind of set it aside a couple

years after I did it," she said. "But I'd look at it and think, 'I wish I had time to paint again.' "

She said it was done after the terrorist attacks of 9-11, "when people were reevaluating what they were doing with their life," she said.

In 2004, she took the plunge and devoted herself solely to creating art. She now produces about three pieces a month.

Some of her work is sold as gift cards at the Red Rock Visitors Center, 1000 Scenic Loop Drive. Kelso donates a portion of her sales to benefit conservation efforts in Nevada.

At the ArtExpo, she will occupy booth No. 203, a roughly 10-foot-wide by 4-foot-deep space, enough room to display about 10 of her paintings. Visitors can sign up for her mailing list there and be entered in a drawing to win a limited edition giclée of her featured work, titled "Drape."

The international expo is not her only recent exposure. Kelso was a prize winner of Sierra Arts' Nevada Wide Open Competition: Biggest Little Art Show in Nevada, held in May. In late July, she was featured at the World Market Center's International Market Event, held July 28 through Aug. 1. There, she was represented by Lena Walther, Scandinavian Collection.

For more information on Kelso or to view her art, visit <http://www.bkelso.com>.

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