

till Blooming

Ashburn resident Barbara Buer has created amazing art for six decades

BY JILL DEVINE

In the competitive world of fine arts, it can take years of education and training before a serious artist can even hope to have his or her work displayed in a gallery or bought by a collector.

Unless you are Ashburn painter Barbara K. Buer.

Buer is proof that sometimes all an artist needs to succeed is determination and talent. Completely self-taught, Buer, who is 87 and lives with her husband, Per, at Tribute at One Loudoun, has achieved what many trained artists only dream about.

During a career that has spanned more than 60 years, her original paintings – which sell for as much as \$6,000 each – have been displayed at prominent galleries, graced magazine covers, been featured in books, been sought by collectors, and purchased by interior decorators and leading corporations.

“I love the challenge of being able to depict beautifully what I am seeing with my eyes,” Buer said. “I don’t like to be called a ‘photorealist’ per se, but basically, I think that’s what I actually am, because I want my paintings to look as realistic as possible.”

Lifelong Love of Flowers

It’s impossible to view Buer’s work without noticing one dominating constant: flowers. “It’s the subject matter I’ve always had access to,” she said.

Buer became intimately familiar with the range and characteristics of flowers as a young girl. She grew up on Staten Island, and her father was a florist in New York City.

“My father would go to the market in Manhattan at 3:30 a.m. to pick up flowers, and I would go with him when I was a little girl. The sellers would reach out and give me a flower to take home, usually a single orchid, and I loved to study the petals.”

Buer helped her father with arrangements in the shop. “I made bouquets and corsages, but mostly I sat there making bows, because my fingers were small and agile – thus, my interest also in bows.”

Buer points to a large oil painting on her living room wall that she titled “60 Cents a Bow,” which features an almost photographic depiction of racks of pastel-colored Hallmark bows and spools of ribbons.

“That painting is my favorite, because it’s different from all my others,” she said. “The challenge there was to make the bows shine.”



A Self-Taught Talent

Without the aid of a teacher, Buer taught herself to do watercolors in high school. “I just bought supplies and did it – and the more I did it, the better I got,” she explained.

Later when she was married, her husband’s job took the couple to southern England, where they rented a home surrounded by a private garden.

“I realized there that my passion was

to paint blossoms, not arrange them, and I began to dabble,” she said.

Buer and her husband then moved to Pennsylvania, and she began to paint more seriously after her son, Peter, started going to school.

Most of Buer’s paintings begin with a photograph. She starts by sketching the outline shapes on the canvas and then filling in with basic under colors. “Then I determine where I want the

highlights to be,” she said. “You can’t make a flower look like a flower using just flat colors. You have to create highlights and shadows to show the variations of the shapes and the bends and turns of the petals.”

She finds paintings made entirely of white flowers to be the most technically challenging but also the most satisfying. “Being able to shape them using just whites and grays is quite difficult.” ☺



That my mother was self-taught ... and that she got so far entirely on her own steam is truly amazing."

Artist Barbara Buer continues to paint each day at her dining room table in her apartment home in Ashburn.



Buer and her husband moved to Ashburn a few years ago to be near Peter and his family. Peter recalls that critics liked his mother's skill at showing how light reflects through a crystal vase or through the petals of a flower. "That my mother was self-taught ... and that she got so far entirely on her own steam is truly amazing."

Still Creating

Buer continues to paint at her home. Although her building has an art studio, she prefers to paint where she always has throughout her career – at her dining room table. "My husband has Alzheimer's, and I want to stay near him," she said lovingly.



"60 Cents a Bow" — a painting by artist Barbara Buer that hangs on her living room wall.

Andrew Riley, community relations director at Tribute at One Loudoun, said residents and staff have recognized Buer's talents.

"Barbara definitely commands an audience," Riley said.

Roughly every month or two, Buer sells an original painting or a high-quality

giclee print through her personal website or other online marketers.

"I think the reason my paintings sell is because of the subject matter, especially with decorators," she said. "The decorator selects a painting because the colors in a specific flower match the color themes in a particular room,

and they can work with that."

Buer is exceptionally modest when talking about her art – except when she reflects on what she considers the pinnacle of her long career. She is rightly proud of being selected as a signature member of two highly respected art societies: the American Watercolor Society and the National Watercolor Society.

The memberships require a rigorous juried submission process. Her entrance paintings for the American Watercolor Society were displayed at the prestigious Salmagundi Club on Fifth Avenue in New York, one of the oldest art organizations in the country.

"That was the grandest thing that happened to me professionally," Buer said, "and those are designations truly worth bragging about." ▣

To see more of Buer's artwork, check out her website at barbarabuerartist.com.

Jill Devine is a freelance writer and former magazine editor from Loudoun County who writes for a variety of Virginia publications.