

State of the Arts

What a sketch!

by Michelle Roach

On any of the beautiful days Nantucket has been experiencing this summer, it is not unusual to see people parked on sidewalks, gardens and docks set up with easels, sketch books and tripods, taking in and interpreting the island's natural beauty and charm into their artwork. And in the mornings in town, one might spot a small group of these artist-types toting around blue and silver beach chairs in addition to their creative props. These folks are the ones who line up to take advantage of Anne Butler's Sketching Tours of Nantucket.

This three-hour tour is geared for anyone with an interest in art, from amateur to professional, kid to grandparent, student to doctor. Butler, professional artist and art teacher, integrates lessons on the basics of graphite sketching (pencil drawing) and the use of charcoal, as well as more intricate techniques and styles, in the brief walk through town where she stops periodically to offer historical tidbits.

The first part of the sketching tour begins in the outdoor classroom of upper Main Street as Butler introduces the difference between the functions of the left versus the right side of the human brain. She explains how the left brain is what processes technical, mechanical and learned concepts, whereas the right brain is the facilitator for the creative, emotional and aesthetic.

Encouraging the use of the right brain when drawing, Butler works individually with each participant as they sketch a doorway on Main Street. This choice of basic architecture as subject matter, according to Butler, is preferred because of the familiar lines and shapes for beginners, and the more ornate decorations and detailed building styles for more advanced artists.

She also incorporates and enforces the 80/20

theory in sketching, where the artist spends 80% of the time looking at the subject and only 20% of the time at the paper. Students are given approximately an hour to work on their sketches before moving on to the second part of the tour.

Butler has discovered some beautiful and private gardens in the same vicinity where she brings her students to receive instruction on and practice in sketching in the softer, less intricately detailed art of charcoal sketching. This change of environment helps to give a fresh perspective with this new artistic technique.

As an artist, Butler uses these sketching tours as additional practice for her own artwork, as she ironically does not specialize in either medium she teaches on the tour. She concentrates more on oil and pastel landscapes rather than rigidly detailed structural depictions. She prefers the use of loose lines producing a more free and fluid effect, adorned with numerous layers of color. Her tours give her the conditioning and structure which helps to create an artistic balance with her free-form expressionism.

Some of Butler's recent pieces in pastel reflect the landscapes of Madaket. These depictions have a very rich and full appearance due to her use of textured paper, where the tiny crevices of the page fill up with pigment from the soft pastels. This use of texturing and complimentary colors gives each piece a lush and realistic appearance full of emotion and sentiment.

Butler's sketching tours will continue through the month of August and are offered daily from 10 am until 1 pm. Reservations are suggested, as the classes fill up quickly, and she tries to keep them deliberately small to allow for personal attention. All supplies are available for purchase, and all that is required is an open mind, the willingness to learn and the courage to try.