

State of the Arts

Be on the look out

by Florrie Ives

You have noticed them. A cluster of attentive bodies hidden under sun hats, perched on canvas camping stools, gazing intently at a picket fence or hydrangea bush. Have they been in your neighborhood, on your street, or even in front of your house? This crowd is not out for a suntan or an historical tour, they are on an artistic mission, a "sketching tour" of Nantucket with artist Anne Baldwin Butler as their guide. Together these artists seek bursting patterns in a window box, the stately lines of an 18th century door, the highlights and shadows of a rose trellis, the glory of a summer day.

Watch these sketchers absorbed in capturing the soft shadows around a door knocker or the delicate lines of a day lily in bloom, and it's obvious that they relish the beautiful details of the island that so many of us fail to even notice. These artists are lost in their work. Time stops as squinted, darting eyes and charcoal stained fingers chase light and shadow across paper, engaging with Nantucket's beauty in a way the camera cannot.

Butler is a talented artist and instructor who celebrates her fourth season of drawing and teaching on Nantucket. She begins each sketching tour with guided drawing exercises that loosen hands and open the eyes. Butler assists students in looking for the contour lines of a building, the positive and negative spaces found in a tree branch, the busy patterns and shapes hiding in a hedge. Whether a student has years of experience or is just picking up a drawing pencil for the first time, her class invites one

to stretch skills of observation and provides uninterrupted time for drawing practice.

After the brief instruction, sketchers are invited to wander through the neighborhood of the day and find a subject. A morning of sketching is the ultimate island escape. All urgency about time is lost when behind a drawing pad. The most important task of the moment becomes how to reveal the essence of a brick wall without drawing every single brick, or whether to include particular details, like a flower pot, in the sketch. Only an artist has the power to add or subtract a window or tree with the turn of the pencil.

Butler provides individual instruction and guidance as students work, and leads a small critique half-way through the session. Ten different artists can gather and draw the exact same subject and 10 every individual renderings appear. The opportunity to share one's work and learn from others is an extremely beneficial part of the day.

Some sketchers choose to spend the entire three hours on one drawing, while others may opt to work on several. Time flies when one begins to sketch, the challenge is to stop in time for lunch. Fortunately, Butler's tours are offered three days a week, so when the sketching bug bites, there is ample opportunity to build on each day's inspiration. Classes run from 10am-1pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays in July and August. Sketching stools are provided and supplies can be purchased if needed. For more information and daily locations, call Anne Baldwin Butler at 228-1478.