

Artist





Monique Rollins
and her "Boa-
Constrictor
Landscape" oil.

Monique Rollins followed her calling to a life of painting

When art teacher Terry Newitt began working with a teenage Monique Rollins in the mid-1990s he knew that painting was her calling.

"I saw the need," said Newitt, an art teacher at Archmere Academy who taught Rollins, 29, for three years in private lessons and at the school.

He recalled tutoring Rollins on a study trip to Ireland. Rollins would paint from morning until dusk, banging out four watercolors in the morning and sketches in the afternoon. Her dedication never wavered.

"Her energy was obviously noticeable," he said. "Other students, their eyes would glaze over. Not hers."

Rollins never stops giving him reasons to be impressed. At her recent exhibition at The Grand in downtown Wilmington, which runs through the end of February in the baby grand, her work is of a style and scope that is a long way from the 11-by-14-inch watercolor landscapes she did in Ireland.

One abstract oil painting, a joyous symphony of sensual color and form called "Boa-Constrictor Landscape," is 6-by-40-feet. By comparison, N.C. Wyeth's massive wall mural "Apotheosis of the Family" that graced the walls of the nearby former WSFS Bank on North Market Street for 75 years is 19-by-60-feet.

"I just wanted to enrapt the viewer in a beautiful world of color and emotion and vibrancy of these figures moving through an invented space," Rollins said of her piece.

Newitt was suitably enraptured.

"She's not a dilettante," he said. "She's got the drive."

Catherine Redmond, an associate professor at Pratt Institute in New York who worked with and taught Rollins, agrees.

"Talent is very cheap. God spreads a lot of talent around. A calling is very rare," Redmond said. "It means a willingness to sacrifice, to have a life of solitude, to spend time with the work. It means getting in there and slogging through it because you must do it. Being driven is an essential quality. I think Monique has an important future."

That calling led Rollins to get a

Bold, brash & ambitious

BY MAUREEN MILFORD || PHOTOGRAPH BY WILLIAM BRETZGER

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bachelor's degree in fine arts from Syracuse University in 2002, followed by two master's degrees from Pratt, one in fine arts and another in art history. She also got a certification in museum studies. Rollins studied and worked in Italy, and had internships at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Farnsworth Museum in Camden, Maine.

After graduation, Rollins chose the life of a pure painter, a road less taken in today's digital age, Newitt said.

"Terry Newitt gave me an understanding of being an artist and that it is a vocation," Rollins said.

In recent years, Rollins, who is the daughter of Michele Rollins and the late John Rollins Sr. of near Centreville, had worked out of her studio in Brooklyn. Her work was exhibited in shows in New York, Wilmington and Jamaica. In January, Rollins moved to Florence with her Italian-born husband, Marco Ceccatelli, whom she met in 2001 while living in Italy. She plans to set up a studio and get gallery representation.

To Rollins, painting requires a different mindset.

"You have to be relaxed and allow your mind to follow the thread of creativity so that magic can happen in the studio," she said.

"Pink Cylinder" demonstrates Rollins' love of color.

The advertisement is split into two main sections. On the left, a large, square-cut diamond ring with two smaller rectangular-cut diamonds on either side is displayed against a black background. On the right, a woman with dark hair, wearing a black spaghetti-strap top and a necklace of small, heart-shaped or teardrop-shaped diamonds, is smiling. A white, torn-paper-like vertical line separates the two images. At the bottom, the text for Stuart Kingston Jewelers is centered.

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Rollins says her abstract expressionism, including "Whimsy," is "feeling-based. My work is all feeling-based."

What's more, art needs to be viewed in an atmosphere of calm, she said.

"In this day and age with television and video games and constant activity you need to put yourself in that quiet contemplative state of mind to be able to enjoy painting. Art is not something that tells you automatically what you're looking at. You have to allow yourself to be with the work and explore it with your mind and your imagination," Rollins said.

Monique Rollins admits that a lifetime of visiting Jamaica, where her family owns Rose Hall resort, influenced her sense of color.

"Jamaica is another world of color," she said. "You need to bring different tubes of paints. They have different greens."

Italy also has had an influence on her work.

"I think travel is so important because you just see different everything," she said.

Rollins' style of painting has changed dramatically since doing those representational landscapes in high school. She loves the emotive color of abstract expressionism.

"It's all feeling-based. My work is all feeling-based," she said.

To Redmond, Rollins' work, while lyrical, has a "powerful and assertive drumbeat that makes the lyricism all the more resonant."

But Rollins doesn't put her work in a category other than to say it is abstract and large scale. Influences include Arshile Gorky, Joan Miro, Willem de Kooning and Wassily Kandinsky.

"I think art should bring you to another place much in the same way that music can transport you to another moment, another feeling, another memory."

Her paintings accomplished that among viewers who saw Rollins' exhibit in December, prompting The Grand to extend the show through February.

"We decided to extend the exhibit based on the response we got," said Pamelyn Manocchio, director of community engagement with The Grand. "I think we'll be seeing more of Monique."



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