



In the Moment

AN UNFETTERED APPROACH TO PAINTING

BY ALICE ROSS



Karen Bateman, painting en plein air

Above: "Colors of Autumn," oil on canvas,
12" x 16"

Opposite: "Enticing Path," oil on canvas,
16" x 12"



If Karen Bateman's portfolio seems familiar, perhaps it is because her subject matter is drawn from the same scenic views that attract so many of our region's landscape painters. Regardless of what she depicts—the jagged rocks of Great Falls, a Loudoun County vineyard in autumn, or sun-washed bales of hay arrayed against the majestic backdrop of the Shenandoah Valley—Karen strives to capture the colors, textures and atmosphere of nature.

Though she occasionally paints portraits and still lifes, Karen is predominantly a landscape artist, specializing in *alla prima* oil painting. It's a style she came to fairly recently and one she has embraced wholeheartedly.

Although she took several classes and experimented with different styles of painting early in her artistic career, it wasn't until she participated in a *plein air* workshop that Karen discovered her true passion. "I never used to finish my projects in the classes I took," she admits. Three years ago, however, she found her artistic voice through a workshop taught by renowned landscape painter Jack Warden, artist-in-residence at Riverbend Park in Great Falls. "Jack showed me how to stay true to what's in front of me," says Karen. "I've learned so much from him about observing the light and shadows and changing colors. I'm really in my element when I paint outdoors." Last year Karen collaborated with her former teacher, now her "painting buddy," for an exhibit that showcased their respective visions of similar scenes.

During her artistic evolution, the Great Falls resident has juggled art classes with family obligations and a career as a scientific coordinator at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda. Yet she adheres to an ambitious painting regimen. "I rarely paint during the week, but I'm out there almost every weekend," she says, adding that it's important for her to maintain a regular painting schedule. "I get grouchy if I don't paint for a while."

Favorite haunts include secluded points along the Potomac River, particularly in Riverbend Park. Occasionally she returns to a location, tackling a particular landscape element at different times of the day or in different seasons. The same bare tree that juts out over the river in "That Sycamore," for example, is reprised in "Sycamore in Winter," albeit from a different vantage point.

Even though she returns frequently to paint certain beloved sites, Karen finds that each outing offers a unique experience. The changing seasons are especially conducive to creating fresh discoveries. "I love fall," she says. "It's my favorite time of year. You get such warm colors in the early morning and late afternoon. It's always challenging to try to catch the light. Depending on the season, I also can paint different types of sky. With fall coming, I find myself trying to capture the dynamic feeling of the sky. There's so much color and movement going on, and the air is so crisp and cool."

Unlike some artists who have various works in progress at any given time, Karen prefers to work on one piece at a time. Pushing oils in the *alla prima* style motivates her to stay with a project and see it through from start to finish. "I find that painting on-site requires me to paint quickly. The light is always changing, and the sky is moving. I have to work fast."

Karen rarely tweaks a piece after an outdoor painting session. "Once I sign my name to a painting, it's finished," she says. "Signing my name is like inserting a punctuation mark—it shows that I've reached the end."

These days, Karen is experimenting with painting in a larger format. "I'm pushing myself to scale up from some of my smaller pieces," she says. "It's a



new challenge because I still have to work quickly and paint over a larger area."

Karen will be among a group of artists, including painters, a jewelry designer and a photographer, based at Great Falls United Methodist Church during the Seventh Annual Great Falls Studios Tour, which features 25-plus studio stops throughout Great Falls on October 16 and 17. Weather permitting, tour participants will find Karen outside where she plans to demonstrate her *alla prima* style.

Karen Bateman

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Top: "Daffodils," oil on canvas, 6" x 8"

Above: "Smells Like Snow," oil on canvas, 12" x 16"

Opposite: "Red Roof (detail)," oil on canvas, 8" x 10"

