



Eagle artist's images of Ireland at Milwaukee gallery

*Landmarks Gallery
exhibit free, open to the
public through March 31*

By Carol Spaeth-Bauer~Staff writer

Town of Eagle - Audrey Casey has plenty of stories to accompany her paintings of Ireland. The same paintings that are featured in the exhibit now open at Landmarks Gallery, 231 N. 76th St., Milwaukee, which runs through March 31.

Stories like getting stuck in a turnabout in Ireland on one of her five visits to the country. Audrey and her husband James found themselves endlessly circling, turning on the vehicle's wipers instead of the turn signal as they tried to maneuver out of the turnabout.

Everything from water faucets to a car's controls is the opposite of what Americans are used to, the 73-year-old artist explained. When Audrey and James wanted to signal a turn they instead turned on the windshield wipers. They eventually solved the problem by hanging a glass- case on the wiper control.

Then there is the story of the vehicle with the rear wiper that started running of its own accord and could only be stopped by turning the vehicle off.

Audrey recalled a visit to Ireland when she wanted to revisit a stone farmhouse to check the accuracy of one of her paintings but couldn't find the building because it had been whitewashed since her last visit.

She has many stories to accompany her

paintings and prints that are part of Landmarks' "Ireland Revisited." "Ireland Revisited" is an exhibit of landscapes, villages, and city scenes by Irish and American artists, which features Audrey's work alongside those of several Irish artists.

But more intriguing than the stories connected to her paintings is the story of the unassuming journey Audrey's career as an artist has taken.

Audrey started painting in 1978 at the age of 47. Her interest was piqued by vis-

its to art shows. After repeatedly viewing different artists' work she thought she'd like to try her hand at painting.

"I thought maybe I could do it (painting). I didn't know. So I started reading books. I took one year of country painting at WCTC," Audrey recalled.

Except for a couple of workshops, Audrey taught herself the techniques of oil painting. She taught herself so well that eventually she ended up teaching oil

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CAROL SPAETH-BAUER / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Irish countryside scenes ~ Audrey Casey displays some of her work that will be part of an exhibit at Landmarks Gallery in Milwaukee through March 31

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painting at Waukesha County Technical College for five years.

Being an evening course in oil painting, many of Audrey's students were retired or in another field. She's taught engineers, architects and a nun.

"I think I was an inspiration to the students," Audrey commented. "To think that at my age I started (painting) and ended up teaching, they just thought, 'well there's hope for me'."

It was the engineers and architects in the class that made Audrey nervous. "They knew the structures. I didn't. I'd just kind of squint and if it would look right..."

Audrey's interest in art started in high school where she had one semester of art. After that she couldn't fit it in her schedule. "I never took another class."

But she dabbled in art during her eight years as den mother where she was always called on for arts and crafts projects.

Her 21 years of volunteering as a teacher's aide at Holy Apostle School were marked with time teaching art to seventh and eighth grade students because the school didn't have an art teacher.

She recalled an eighth grade teacher that would sit at the back of the room with his head hanging down while she worked with the students. "I thought he was resting while I was talking. He wasn't," Audrey laughed. "He was taking notes so he could teach art he said."

Now with numerous awards, juried exhibits and shows to her name, Audrey has traveled far beyond grade school art. Those travels have taken her to Door County to sketch landmarks, to Racine County to sketch lighthouses, to Cedarburg to sketch a covered bridge, to Minnesota, and of course to Ireland.

Concentrating her efforts on rural Americana and Ireland, Audrey's work reflects "an understanding of the past, combined with the present, to convey the spirit of rural life."

That spirit of rural life surrounds Audrey and James where they sit nestled quietly off Sprague Rd. on a lot they purchased in 1974.

Waiting for their five children to complete their education at Catholic Memorial High School (bussing was provided from their New Berlin home), it wasn't until two years ago that the couple

built a house and moved to Eagle.

Here Audrey has room for her grandchildren to play baseball and plenty of space for her painting.

She starts each painting by sketching first, taking lots of photographs and using colored pencils or watercolors to get the colors right.

From there it is endless hours mounting to months of work where she paints one color and lets it dry, then paints another and lets it dry. "In order to get so much detail, you can't paint wet on wet," Audrey noted.

Once a painting is finished, her husband takes over and does the matting and framing. Since retiring from Miller Brewing, James has helped not only with framing and matting, but at art shows as well.

When it comes time for a show, their children, and sometimes some of their ten grandchildren, take turns helping with shows — both in setting up the show and in sales. "It's a real family affair."

Through the years, Audrey's grandchildren have learned much about art and art shows. Audrey's influence has been so strong that one granddaughter, Erin, became an art major and is now adding teaching to her repertoire.

Even Brenna, the youngest granddaughter has a coloring book for her artistic aspirations perched alongside some of Audrey's work.

While it's easy to see where Audrey's grandchildren have inherited their talent, Audrey smiles and questions, "But where did I get mine?"

Wherever Audrey's talent came from it doesn't take a trained eye to appreciate the skill that goes into each painting. Be it an Irish castle or a summertime farmyard Audrey's work celebrates rural life.

And with 50 paintings in print totaling more than 200 prints for each painting — some had as many as 600 prints — that adds up to thousands of copies of Audrey's work. Thousands of copies purchased by thousands of people celebrating not only rural life but also the artistic talent of Audrey Casey.