

# Painter Takes a Left-Handed Approach to Her Art

## BWAC President Explores Eclectic Work On Canvas

By Christy Goodman

One Brooklyn artist's lifelong, yet quiet, rebellion has been heard by many and will continue to touch the lives of many more.

Bay Ridge's Audrey Frank Anastasi has run against the stereotypes of the times and the close-mindedness of the art world to become the ageless artist and advocate that is well known throughout the boroughs for her volunteer work with the Brooklyn Working Artists Coalition (BWAC).

"My entire career, I have painted exactly what I wanted to, whether it was considered acceptable or not acceptable at the time," she said. "I do work in a variety of media and styles—whatever is appropriate for the piece which is generally not encouraged, but I don't care."

As a child growing up in northwest Baltimore, Anastasi had already fallen in love with color, sketching and the creation of an image. Her mother would take her to regular art classes at the Baltimore Museum of Modern Art.

In fact, her first art show was held on her front porch. An original work would have cost the buyer a hot five cents—her first alternative venue.

"It took me a long time to realize I had to get them to come to me," said the woman who has helped to bring 11,000 prospective buyers to the tucked away Van Brunt Piers in Red Hook for a single BWAC Pier Show.

Despite the encouragement from her family, Anastasi, who moved to rural Miami when she was 12, never actually thought as a teen that she would become a career painter. Like most girls her age, she planned on graduating high school and getting married, but she never had any specific plans.

Thank goodness for her high school teacher, Ms. Violet.

"Ms. Violet got the forms together to submit to college," said Anastasi, who ended up attending University of Miami on a fine arts scholarship. "On the first day of college I found out what grad school was and knew I wanted to keep going."

It was the first time she saw the life of an artist, or "seeing everyday in a creative way," as she described.

"Art is the process. We are always doing it. It is always around you," said her husband of many years, Joseph, a chosen object artist. "If you are an artist, you will always be doing it."

Pratt brought Anastasi to New York in a time when artists were painting abstracts and were virile, cigar-smoking, hard drinking men.

She was a right-handed, precise illustrative artist that was highly influenced by the styles and techniques of the Renaissance, who was too young for gallery shows and off the self-indulgent path that was all the rage in the art world.

Needless to say, she was shunned, burned and frustrated, but she was still confident and had her own way of doing things.

"I spent one year in Manhattan and came

right back to Brooklyn," she said as she walked the paint-spattered floors of her Windsor Terrace studio. "You can have space and community. It touched me more."

Over 15 years ago, she bought her studio—something she encourages all artists to do—and lived there until she was married. It was around that time she surrendered her control and self-editing techniques to be more intuitive with her work by painting only with her left hand—making for broader and purposeful strokes that led to a whole new perspective for both her and the viewer.

"She was incredibly technical and highly perfected about how she would paint a subject," said Joseph as he sat in front of a small workbench displaying his constructions, one of which involved a glass juicer. "Now she captures the soul and essence. You are not a voyeur, but a part of it."

Anastasi looked to her husband and smiled, "Joseph was very encouraging when I switched to the left hand. He encouraged me to reach something I was trying to do."

Besides the effects the two have on each other as a couple, they are each other's first critic. They also share what Anastasi described as a kindred spirit to find the spiritual and emotional metaphors in their work.

For the past nine years they have also worked together for BWAC, helping the organization grow from a few artists displaying their work to a community that offers opportunities for artists working in and out of the mainstream to exhibit and sell their work in several major shows a year.

"I want to help people get their work out there," said Anastasi, who has been advocating for alternative venues since traditional galleries can be very discouraging.

In addition, Anastasi always promotes painting from the heart and not what the time dictates, as she has done.

Celebrating Women's History Month is "Figurative Vision" at the Manhattan Borough President's Office, located at One Centre Street on the 19<sup>th</sup> Floor. The show will be up weekdays, until April 28, from 10 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. A photo ID is required. To RSVP, call (212) 669-4462.

Anastasi has one piece four-feet by three-feet that shows a woman in a contemporary setting.

"It is a really worthwhile show to see," said Anastasi, who used to teach at Parsons School of Design. "There are more women making art than showing art."

She also recently presented work in the exhibit "Art Explores Jewish Themes" that was held at NAWA Fifth Avenue Gallery, located at 80 Fifth Avenue, suite 1405, where she presented two works from her Animals from the Ark series that is Jesso painted over gold leaf, creating pairs of monkeys and giraffes in almost disturbing clarity.

For more information, go online to [www.audreyanastasi.com](http://www.audreyanastasi.com).



Anastasi is exhibiting work at "Figurative Vision" at the Manhattan Borough President's Office, located at One Centre Street on the 19<sup>th</sup> Floor until April 28.



Bay Ridge's Audrey Frank Anastasi encourages the many artists she helps organize with BWAC to always paint from the heart.