

– West Pittston Painter –

Maffei Making An Impression On Art World

By Laura Musto
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One area artist has been receiving notable recognition across the country for her work in abstract impressionism.

Individuals who pass by Sandra Maffei's home in West Pittston would never guess the work that goes on inside the white Victorian style house. But, then again, those that pass Sandra Maffei on the street probably would not think that this 62 year old woman, wife and mother of one, is emerging as one of the area's most noted abstract impressionist painters. In fact, Maffei, herself, will tell that prior to 20 years ago, she had never envisioned herself as a painter.

Born and raised in Wilkes-Barre, Maffei's dreams as a child weren't to paint. Instead Maffei trained and became a registered nurse, married and had a son.

"I had no interest as a child," said Maffei, when referring to painting. "There was nothing available in the schools. I grew up in an age where you worked to make a living." It wasn't until her son, George, was grown and out of school that Maffei decided to try her hand at painting. With the support of her husband, Carmen

and her son, Maffei, then in her forties, went back to school to study art, especially during the 1950's and 1960's when she and her family lived in New York.

Living at the time in Florida, Maffei studied at the Florida/Atlantic University and then later, when she returned back to the area, at Wilkes University, Marywood and Luzerne County Community College.

"I started painting in the 1970's," said Maffei. "I wanted to find out what it was all about."

Maffei studied photography and different styles of painting, before finding her niche: abstract impressionism. Maffei spends almost every morning in her studio, the renovated parlor of her house.

"I stuck with painting," said Maffei. "It really takes a long time to learn. You have to make a lot of mistakes to learn things."

She explains that much of the inspiration she gets for her work comes through travel.

"I love to travel," said Maffei. "You get a visual thing stuck in your head and just start painting. It is an intuitive thing." Maffei tells that it is the colors, composition and emotion put into a painting that make it come alive. She adds that unlike many other artists she tries to stay true to the concept of abstract

painting. Maffei explains that if she begins painting and her piece starts to resemble an object, for example, a tea pot, she immediately scraps the painting and begins again.

Working without a guideline or reference point, but instead with merely an idea or concept can be difficult, but Maffei believes that the piece itself should dictate what it should be.

"At a certain point the painting will tell you when to finish. I don't have anything preconceived," explains Maffei. Looking at the walls of Maffei's studio one can chart the progress of her work. Plaques, ribbons and awards tell the story of a woman who has grown and flourished in the art world.

However, Maffei tells that getting recognized is not easy. Much of Maffei's time is spent taking pictures of her pieces, making slides and sending them across the country to be judged for various art exhibits. She explains that the rejection can be horrible and it is hard not to let the turn-downs shake her confidence. However, she adds that it is at these times, when she wonders if she can ever paint another exceptional piece, that she turns back to her wall of awards for motivation.

Maffei also explains that individuals who enter artwork into compositions must have a realistic attitude about the process for having their work chosen. Many times a piece that is submitted one place and rejected, may be picked at another place and win an award. Maffei says this is because the judges that choose the works which will be featured in an exhibit, each have their own individual preferences.

"I try to see as many shows as I can, even shows I don't make," said Maffei who adds that it is important to see what the judges were looking for at exhibits where her work was not picked.

"Often I go and think, "I couldn't have made this show, Picasso couldn't have made this show".

Maffei, however, feels she is lucky because her pieces have been accepted to many shows across the country. She adds that she generally has paintings featured in five or six national shows a year. "I think I'm lucky," said Maffei. "Some artists do not get into any shows at all."

Last month Maffei's work was picked to be featured as part of the "Explorations: Small World" display at the fourth annual Connecticut Women's Caucus for Art National Juried Show.