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Sailing along Mackinac race artist rides crest of the wave



Karen Carter talks about her love of detail in front of her oil painting, "Mackinac Yachtmen." It shows the preparations on the morning of the race.

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

BEING THE official artist of the Port-Huron-to-Mackinac Island Race offers Karen Carter benefits as well as thrills.

The landscape-turned-seascape painter will be photographing the race which starts Saturday from the official press boat. She uses photographs for reference when she does her paintings.

Her appointment as "official artist" was made earlier this year by the sponsoring Bayview Yacht Club.

Carter, a Birmingham resident, teaches art for children at Farmington Community Center and has taught in community education programs in Southfield and Royal Oak.

The Gross Pointe Yacht Club owns her oil painting, "Spinnakers Unfurled," showing the beginning of the 1982 Port-Huron-to-Mackinac race.

An 18-by-24-inch limited edition lithograph of the painting was made by the Atlantis Art Group of Lambeth, Ontario.

A one-artist show of her paintings is on display at the Times Herald Building in Port Huron through July 28. Carter will be there all day Friday to talk to visitors. The print will also be available at that time. Other Port-Huron-to-Mackinac paintings are in the show along with many landscape and lake scenes.

THE ORIGINAL of "Spinnakers," 36 by 48 inches, and "Mackinac Yachtmen," also an oil of the same size, are the largest she has done so far.

"Mackinac Yachtmen," which shows the crews loading gear for the race, is a detailed, colorful description of the busy preparations for the big moment. It will be in the Port Huron show.

Carter said, "I'm fascinated by small detail."

Her family has a summer home on Lake Huron so Carter has seen the start of many Port-Huron-to-Mackinac races.

"The bagpipers pipe them out, the draw bridges

(on the river) all go up. It's very colorful," she said.

She remembered her disappointment when she was a student and the art classes were outside to paint. The idea, she said, was to do one quick watercolor for each class session.

When she learned that certain artists worked outside for 30-40 hours in a particular area, she said, "That tipped me off that you have to spend a considerable time to capture the layers of foliage or develop shading from light to dark. That's what got me started on doing landscape paintings that were very detailed — which I like to do."

She said many members of the Gross Pointe Yacht Club can identify the tiny figures of the crews in "Spinnakers" and that pleases her.

"I'm not a sailor," she said, "but I sort of think it's an advantage. I can work with a certain objectivity and accuracy. I think of painting water as challenge and I always wanted to have water in every painting. . . I really like for subject matter to be unique to a certain area."

SHE SENSED early in her art education that she couldn't convey with an abstract approach the message which she sees in her realist paintings.

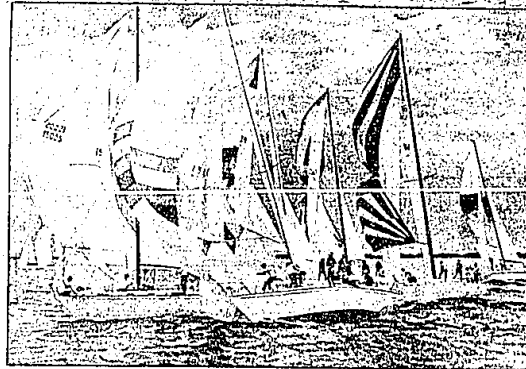
She described it as "a kind of wonder at the world. . . a kind of reverence of the world around you, a moment in time." That, she said, is what gives her pleasure.

"I'm going to be doing more boat paintings this summer and I'm going to try to do the start of the Canadian Cup Race in September."

She has bachelor's and master's degrees in art education from University of Michigan and did graduate work in watercolor, art history and sculpture at University of Colorado.

Her work has been shown in many area galleries, regional invitational shows and is in both the Detroit Institute of Arts and Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association rental galleries.

She is active in Michigan Watercolor Society, Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, Detroit Society of Women Painters and Sculptors and Palette & Brush.



"Impending Gale" (far left) is appealing, not only for its color and detail, but for the symmetry of the design. "Spinnakers" (middle left) is the only one of Carter's paintings which has been made into a limited edition lithograph. It depicts the start of the 1982 Port-Huron-to-Mackinac race.

Staff photos by Mindy Saunders

Chinaware collector publishes 1st book

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

When Joan Oates of West Bloomfield discovered Phoenix Bird china, she found more than blue and white dishes. She hooked into what would become a consuming hobby, a lifestyle and, eventually, a career.

For the past 15 years, ever since an aunt left her a set of this Japanese made-for-export china, she has collected it non-stop — photographed it, cataloged it, given programs on it, published a quarterly newsletter on it and, most recently, published the first of a planned three books on it.

Almost single-handedly, she has built a national awareness of this once-obscure import, which was sold in the five and ten and even at present the selling Needlework magazine subscriptions.

Oates will be autographing copies of her book, showing a sampling of her collection and talking with collectors at the antiques show at the Llandell Ice Arena, Crooks and Lexington, Royal Oak, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, July 13, 14, 15.

HER THIRTIETHY also shows at antiques shows are on display in cupboards and shelves throughout the house, but she continues to search for more.

"There are still a hundred pieces I don't have," she said.

THE MOST AS VALUABLE of her newest acquisition — a hand-painted berry set. The hand-painted, signed (in Japanese) pieces are rare. Many companies made this china, all using ex-

actly the same decorative pattern. She has 40 different makers' marks (beckstamps) in her book and estimates that 50-60 companies made Phoenix Bird china at one time or another from 1891 to 1931. One of the most prominent was Morimura, which was affiliated with Noritake, but no pieces carry the Noritake name.

Today the pattern is still used, but only for ginger jars and rice spoons.

The pieces in Oates' collection vary considerably in quality, of the ware itself, intensity of the blue and white of the design.

The rings, ranging from those on the shelves in Oates' dining room, living room, family room, kitchen and bathroom to those — chocolate, blue and coffee pots, teapots and cups and saucers — which she has given away.

Oates has documented the ware from catalogs, pictures in magazines and her references she has found.

Her collection is now being collected in the United States and Japan.

"It's kind of a clearing house," she said.

When she had her husband, Ken, who doubles as photographer and travel agent, they call "Phoenix Bird" anything interesting and making new friends at the same time.

At the time or another, everyone in the family has been involved in the Phoenix Bird china.

Daughter Barbara Davis of Troy made her mother

a queen-size blue and white quilt with a phoenix bird stitched in the large, white center square.

Even the antiques throughout the house more or less serve as a backdrop for the collection.

Oates wears jewelry with the phoenix bird motif and her hair, eyes and face have and complexion make the best of colors total.

Book I covers cups and saucers, tea pots, teapots and creamers and children's sets and hand-painted Books II and III will cover all other pieces — a big end N.Y.

To order the book, send check for \$15.00 (includes postage and handling) to Joan Oates, 4915 Kensington, West Bloomfield 48303.

JOAN OATES' book on Phoenix Bird china is the first of three books to be published. She works as a photographer and travel agent. The first book, "Phoenix Bird," is the first of three books to be published.



Joan Oates has built a collection of Phoenix Bird china that numbers more than 1,000 pieces. She has also been instrumental in establishing it as a collectible. This blue and white Japanese export ware is attractively displayed throughout her home.