

## *Hunterdon Review:*

# Readington Township woman has a passion for painting



Readington Township artist Cara London displays her oil paintings of the Tanglewood Music Festival on a keyboard in the living room of her home. (Photo by Hilary Thomas)

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**READINGTON TWP** – Cara London loves to paint, whether it involves

oils, acrylics or watercolor. And she sculpts too.

London's passion for art is evident when one walks into her Readington Township home where her artwork adorns the walls.

"My whole home is my studio," said London when asked where she works. "It depends what I am painting, what the light is like, what mood I am in."

She pointed to a vase of fading flowers on an old lace tablecloth arranged on the kitchen counter. The arrangement is the subject of a still life, which London is painting. The flowers were rescued from the wedding bouquet of her sister-in-law who was married two weeks earlier and the tablecloth belonged to her Grandma Rosie. The painting itself was revealed when the artist opened the door into her attached two-car garage. There wasn't a car in sight but just a painting drying on an easel with some oil paints, a palette and a bicycle.

### **'Painterly'**

When asked what kind of painter she is, London describes herself as "painterly," which she said means that she revels in the sensuality of the materials – the paint, the color, the texture. Her paintings "speak through the paint and become their own thing," she said.

She said she was not a symbolic painter but an abstract one, and that she does not envisage the result because that would be boring. Instead, she said she allows the painting to grow as she paints or the sculpture to take its form in her hands. Then the paint and the clay "sing," she said.

London was a teenager in Long Island when she first developed a love for art. Initially she enjoyed sculpture, and found that she could not wait to get her hands into clay after taking an introductory class with a friend.

Her passion for art continued to grow when she was a student in art history at Brandeis College in Waltham, Mass. She then attended the New York Studio School and the Parsons School of Design, and afterwards took a job on Wall Street. She said she found her true self while painting together with a group of friends in a loft studio in Tribeca.

"We painted together Atelier style, like the impressionists," she recalled. "For 20 years four of us would meet once a week. We all painted the same subject for three hours and then compared our work." London said the four friends pushed each other towards becoming serious artists, "towards producing honest, meaningful work that says something to the viewer."

Hanging from one of the walls of her living room in Readington Township is a painting of that studio loft. The light from a large window dominates and another loft building seen through it. The colors of paints and palettes splash the foreground.

### **Left The Group**

London left the group of artists when she married and moved with her husband to Readington Township. She and her husband, Eric Sirota, have two children, Julia, 12, and Craig, 11.

Since moving to Hunterdon County in 1992, London has continued to paint and sculpt while teaching others her approach. She teaches at the Hunterdon Academy of the Arts; has been an adjunct professor at Raritan Valley Community College; and has been an instructor at the duCret School of Art, the Lawrenceville School and the Stevens Institute of Technology.

And she has some very special students that she teaches at her home. One of these is Harriett Schwartz, 87, who has been a student of London's since 1992 when she first took up sculpture. Like London, Schwartz fell in love with the "good feeling" of the clay and has worked with the medium now for 16 years, visualizing and feeling objects as she creates them. She has created hands and figures in dance poses. Schwartz studied and loved ballet.

Schwartz is legally blind. London believes that her student's visual impairment is less of a problem to Schwartz than it is to her teacher. Trying to find the words to explain how to improve a sculpted figure to someone who cannot see it is quite a challenge, but Schwartz just knows what to do, said London. The chorus of small red clay figures on a shelf in London's basement is a testament to the years that she and Schwartz have been together.

"Harriett rarely takes her work home," said London, "so I have this wonderful collection here."

## **'A Great Guide'**

Schwartz said London has been "a great guide and I have enjoyed her company for all these years. Working in clay is very therapeutic. I plan to carry on as long as I possibly can."

Since moving to rural Readington, London has created her own visions of the local landscape. Her green backyard abuts preserved farmlands. Although much of her work is abstract, it often contains buildings and structures. Last year she painted a series of paintings of the Bouman-Stickney Farmstead that she donated to the Readington Education Foundation. One of the paintings hangs at the township Board of Education offices.

Five of London's paintings hang at the Hunterdon Medical Center in Flemington and others adorn the walls at the Flemington Jewish Community Center (FJCC). She has donated paintings and murals to other local organizations such as Safe in Hunterdon, the Youth Shelter and the Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance. Her work can be seen and purchased at a number of local galleries, including the FJCC gift shop (with a part of sale price benefiting the FJCC), Matt's Red Rooster Grill in Flemington, Sidetracks Art Gallery in New Hope, Pa., and Riverbank Arts in Stockton.

London's work has been praised by art critics. At a 2007 show in New Hope, she was described as "star of the show" by respected critic and writer, Piri Halasz. Currently a selection of London's work is being exhibited through Friday, Aug. 15, at The River's Edge Gallery at Bridgeton House in Upper Black Eddy, Pa. ([www.bridgetonhouse.com](http://www.bridgetonhouse.com)).

Information about future shows, along with London's story and photographs of many of her works, can be found at [www.caralondon.com](http://www.caralondon.com).