



KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

Elizabeth Pearl will gift Provincetown with a month-long show in July at the Provincetown Public Library. Her street scenes, always quizzical, invite with a quizzical air—a reaction to the non-literal color. One feels the present reaching into the past, a sense of the common place and diurnal which delivers a much loftier message. Look with eyes and mind and something highly personal, very human will be communicated in good art—a whimsical look at a piece of social history with signs, dogs, cats, human beings in near-costume outfits accessorized throughout the painting. An icon quality gives you the spiritual narrative.

I have always enjoyed the Commercial Street scenes of Elizabeth Pearl when shown at local galleries. She brings a view of Provincetown with an added quality—the quality of Coney Island. All became clear when I finally met with the artist, visited her studio, and viewed a series of her paintings and the stories of their evolution. Scenes of the Governor Bradford, The Lobster Pot, and Womencrafts among other shops, and on her easel, a view of the Library, created a visual stroll down Commercial Street. Each canvas was stretched right around and painted right over the edges drawing the viewer right into the painting.

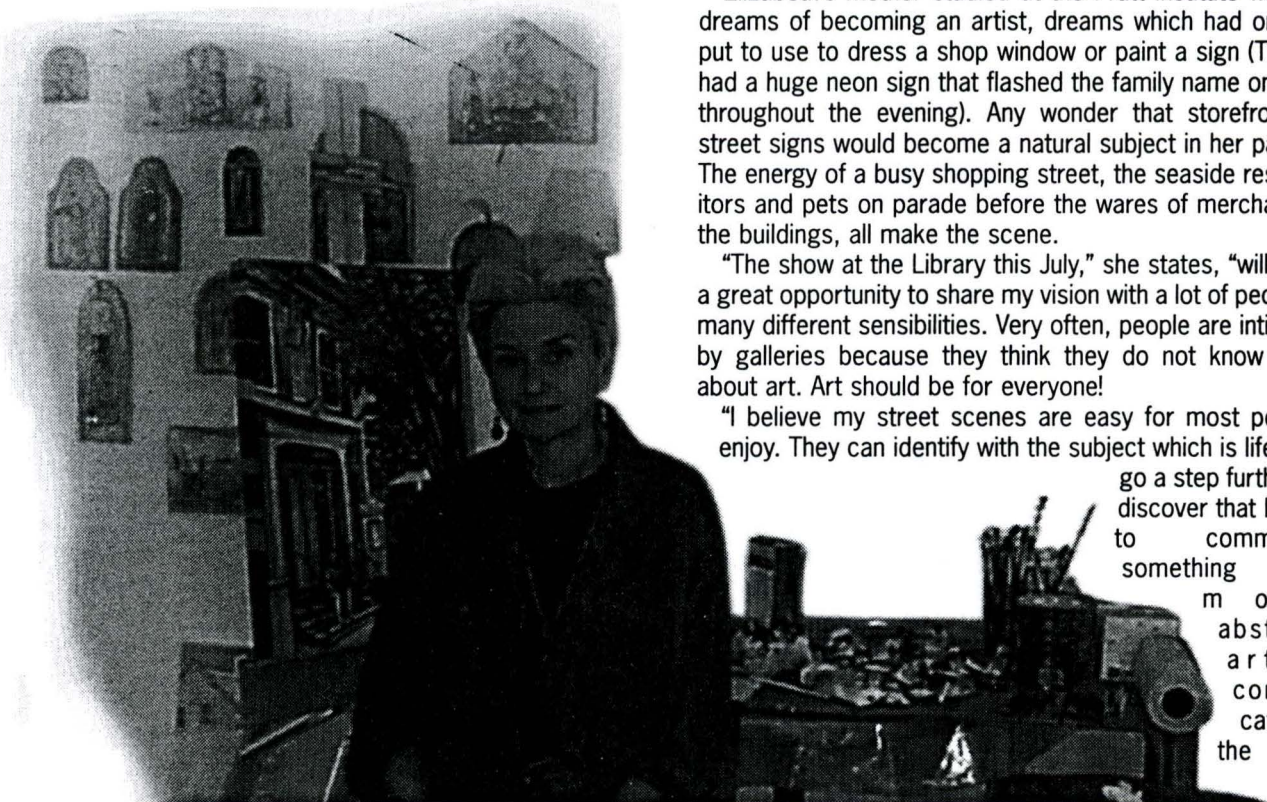
Elizabeth shared that each subject had as much to do with childhood memories as with the present inspirations. For Pearl, Commercial Street captures the essence of Mermaid Avenue, the street on Coney Island, Brooklyn, NY where she grew up. Her grandmother, a Russian-Jewish immigrant began her work in America with a pushcart selling needles and thread. With time she purchased a shop on Mermaid Avenue with living quarters upstairs where three generations lived and worked selling bathing suits in summer and underwear in winter. One recalls a piece of that fading neighborliness that saw the homes open and accessible; where the butcher's cat was loaned to whoever needed a "good mouser." Only a block from the ocean and the amusement park, life went on.

Elizabeth's mother studied at the Pratt Institute where her dreams of becoming an artist, dreams which had only been put to use to dress a shop window or paint a sign (The store had a huge neon sign that flashed the family name on and off throughout the evening). Any wonder that storefronts and street signs would become a natural subject in her paintings? The energy of a busy shopping street, the seaside resort, visitors and pets on parade before the wares of merchants and the buildings, all make the scene.

"The show at the Library this July," she states, "will provide a great opportunity to share my vision with a lot of people with many different sensibilities. Very often, people are intimidated by galleries because they think they do not know enough about art. Art should be for everyone!

"I believe my street scenes are easy for most people to enjoy. They can identify with the subject which is life. If they

go a step further, they discover that I've tried to communicate something much more abstract—artistic communication in the purest





sense. Color relationships, forms, composition, light and energy: these are the traditional values of art.

"Lately I've been exploring, taking my work out of the traditional realm using computer parts and boards I find at the dump." I did notice a heap of wires and boards in the corner noting a very different type of art there, defunct technology revived on touching wood in small shrinelike shapes—icons as appealing as the street scenes, seemingly remote at first—shared the same room with the street scenes until I finally saw them as integral, a step further in the art of communication."

Pearl thinks of this work as much more personal, as her *Idea Art*. "It is probably not as accessible as my paintings. I've been showing the new work at the Art Association, getting it into juried shows. It's a good feeling to have new experimental work accepted by one's peers. That's one of the advantages of living in a place where there are so many artists. It's important for artists to explore new territory. Too many do just the same thing over and over again for 40 or 50 years.

"The work can't help but lose some of its vitality. Artists need time to explore. This also means learning about art—traveling, going to museums, reading and speaking with other artists. Art does not just come out of the air, although I will say there are quite a few "airhead" artists—the ones who get confused about what they have to communicate, who have no sense of art history nor have developed any techniques—the ones who expect the viewer to do all the work.

"If artists wants to communicate, then they need to grab

the viewers' attention and make them want to think, to react. An artist should want the viewer to say, 'Yes, yes! I never thought about it that way before. Yes! I get it!' A good artist will help other people to 'get it.' Again, art should be for everyone willing to look.

"But looking is another subject. The viewer needs to be educated as well as the artist. Why aren't more people interested in art? Maybe the art they see is boring, stupid or badly executed? I'd love to get back to doing some teaching. I like working with young people—full of ideas and energy. I would like to be a guest teaching artist of Kathy Skowron's course for children at the Art Association."

Elizabeth Pearl has visited Provincetown since girlhood. After many adult years with those long four-month summers, she moved here year round ten years ago. A disciplined artist, she works 9-5, five days a week. "I don't wait for inspiration, I just do it. I work every day. Sometimes I spend all day in one small square; other days the energy flows better. I have good work habits, whether the art is great or not or unfinished doesn't matter." Elizabeth Pearl takes her work seriously, a process linked to change and achievement.

Almost as an afterthought as I was leaving, she showed me her experimental "glob painting"—a glob of paint on a surface, wiped off and worked around to observe the spontaneous result. The two small pieces I saw immediately evoked visions of Jean Cocteau, of *Pierrot*, of the film "*Les Enfants du Paradis*"—minotaurs and related myths. My own education was advanced and expanded during this pleasant and intense interview.

I urge you to follow the work of Elizabeth Pearl. You can start at the Library, or if you've read this, you've already started.

