Plein air oil painter Debra Howard is one of many artists that makes it a point to be in the county to paint different scenes on location in the fall. Howard's artwork highlights the colors and light shifting in the fall season, like in this painting, and feeds into a more dynamic piece. (Courtesy photo)

LEELANAU ARTISTS...
inspired by color, nature

By Meakalia Previch-Liu
mea@leelanaunews.com

All year-long, the beauty that is Leelanau County inspires people to create art in various forms. For artists that take brush to canvas, the fall season and colors provide for an endless stream of creativity depicted in their work for people to enjoy and experience.

Plein air oil painter Debra Howard is one of many artists that makes it a point to be in the county to paint different scenes on location in the fall. In 2017, Howard was the artist-in residence at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore Park, and ever since, has taken a particular liking to painting at the park to capture the leaves and foliage changing.

"The beach grass and foliage of everything, it all shifts and changes in the fall, and it makes the water of Lake Michigan even look different when the background is a different color. Those are colors I love," Howard said. "I always just love fall anyway, it's a time to be introspective I think."

Howard paints year-round and travels quite a bit for work, so she tends to work with seasons. In the winter she'll be further south, and in the summers into fall she will be up north in Omena. The apple orchards located throughout Leelanau County are some of Howard's favorite scenes to observe in every season, adding that she is attracted to rhythm, patterns, and repetition in landscapes.

"The orchards really highlight that, and they change in season so much. I love Leelanau because the beauty here is really rather gentle," Howard said. "When I first get here, the cherry blossoms are white and then it gets to this rich green. In the fall, the colors shift again to more of an olive tone... I love how clean and pure the light is up here in Leelanau, it has a lot of blue in it because of the moisture coming off the lakes and it just seems to have a sort of clarity to the color that I find astonishing."

While the national park acts as the perfect place for painting, Howard said she likes to travel in her truck down roads

between Omena and Northport, pulling off to find special areas to paint scenes on location.

"If I see something, I'll just pull over and paint... you see so much," she said. "From a photograph, everything is pretty stagnant and you don't really get a sense of all the other things your senses pick up on. You don't feel how the air is, you don't feel the breeze, you don't understand how the light changes with the sun moving across the sky... all that change, it really feeds into a more dynamic painting."

Howard is affiliated and volunteers with all three art centers in the county, recently winning the Gene Rantz Memorial Paint Out golden hour plein air in July, and previously winning the Glen Arbor Arts Center (GAAC) plein air event twice. Howard's work was also chosen for GAACs 2023-24 Outdoor Gallery annual exhibition. Her five paintings will be displayed through April 2024, when GAAC will then offer the panels in an online auction with all proceeds to benefit the center. To view more of her past and current work, visit www.debrahoward-artist.com.

Kat Dakota, a Suttons Bay based oil painter, said Leelanau County inspires people on some level whether they live or visit here, and some move to only return while others make it a frequent destination.

"God's stunning compositions in Leelanau County inspire me to paint, but fall feeds my spirit in additional ways, maybe partly because I like jeans, jackets and boots," Dakota said. "In addition to the warm colors of reds and yellows against the brilliant blue skies, fall brings the sounds of kicking dry leaves and the feeling of cool breezes — all good reasons to leave the studio. It's the time of year when loading art gear seems easier. I'm not an 80-degree kind of gal."

Dakota said her passion for painting began in her late 50s, starting with landscapes and then transitioning to pet portraits and people. For Dakota, it made sense because she loves animals and meeting strangers. Ending those conversations as friends with people she just met was a natural "high."

In the past year, Dakota participated in three plein air events in Leelanau County where her artwork was sold, receiving a second place award at Northport's Gene Rantz Plein Air Paint Out. No matter the season, Dakota said she looks forward to painting landscapes and waterscapes in the way she envisions, and hopes people will recognize her work through her exploration and ability to create art that "speaks."

While a given approach drove Dakota's early works, she said technique exploration now drives her to create artwork that reflects what she feels in the moment. She added that

PENINSULA PERENNIAL
NURSERY
7740 N. SWEDE ROAD, NORTHPORT, MI • CALL US! (231) 944-6663

FALL IS A GREAT TIME FOR PLANTING!

FALL HOURS: 10 AM TO 4 PM TUESDAY TO SATURDAY
CLOSED SUNDAY AND MONDAY
WWW.PENINSULAPERENNIALS.COM

Tasting room open 12-5
Daily • May - November
Friday - Sunday • December - April
Covid reservations may be needed

2290 S. French Road, Lake Leelanau, Mi 49653
(231) 256-0000
Take M-204 west of the village of Lake Leelanau, 1 mile. turn left on S. French Rd. Tasting room is located 3 miles south on the right.
www.chateaufontaine.com

YARN · ROVING · KNIT · CROCHET
SPIN · WEAVE · CLASSES

leelanau fiber

Open Daily

231-271-YARN
(9276)

310 N. St. Joseph
Suite A
Suttons Bay, MI

www.leelanaufiber.com

Suttons Bay oil painter Kat Dakota created this piece depicting a cow called "Utterly Devoted," blending warm vivid colors together that are almost reflective of the fall season. Dakota's passion for painting began in her late 50s, starting with landscapes and then transitioning to pet portraits and people. (Courtesy photo)

she likes seeing her artwork morph and that she's not seeking a style, but she utilizes oil paint as her material of choice because she likes the vivid color and feel of it which allows her to paint loosely.

"With a small studio, the use of space holds high priority. I also like the look of panels placed in float frames. Often the 'rawness' of textured paper with ripped edges makes me work more intuitively," Dakota said. "I don't plan to stop working with oil, but I see myself exploring with multi-media and watercolor in the near future. I like the freshness and spontaneity of watercolor. It also makes a great journaling option while traveling — a freedom I want to entertain."

People are welcomed to stop by Dakota's Suttons Bay studio, located above the Case Daniels Jewelry store, to see artwork in progress and other originals and prints for sale. Normal hours are Monday-Saturday from 11-6 p.m. If Dakota is working and the open sign is lit, she is open for visitors, noting that conversations fuel her creative energy and visits are not interruptions. To view past art and other projects Dakota has completed, visit www.KatDakota.com.

#LCT23

Local art centers, programs

Glen Arbor Arts Center:

Glen Arbor Arts Center (GAAC), located in the heart of the village of Glen Arbor, offers year-round enriching art and entertainment for everyone. The organization is an active, multidimensional center for the arts, art-making, and creativity. With a variety of events and classes happening all year, there are many opportunities to take part in local activities and discussions. This fall, GAAC will be participating with Northwest Michigan Arts and Culture network for their "Fall for Arts" programming and similar events this fall. Other events starting in September include a plein air presentation from Kathy Mohl on September 8, as well as a presentation from Ann Arbor fiber artist Susan Moran on September 22, who will begin a body of work specifically inspired by Leelanau County. On September 30, there will be a Creativity Q&A Live with Leelanau fiber artist Meg Staley, and an AIR presentation on October 6 from Sault Ste. Marie writer Sara Maurer, who is completing the third draft of her novel "Claybaby." Visit GAAC's website for more information on events coming up: https://glenarborart.org/