

DAILY NEWS



Painter to be featured at gallery that helps women, nurtures talent

Friday, April 4th 2008, 4:00 AM



Tracy for News

Brush in hand, artist Katherine Dolgy Ludwig is having a show of her work at the all-woman A.I.R. Gallery. She is one of six artists doing an 18-month fellowship at the gallery.

Walking through [Katherine Dolgy Ludwig's Williamsburg, Brooklyn](#), apartment feels a bit like walking through a crowded restaurant or down the sidelines during a [Knicks](#) game.

You can feel eyes watching you.

In Ludwig's house the visitor has fallen under the watchful gaze of the scores of bright, watercolor portraits of ordinary New Yorkers adorning the walls.

Ludwig painted them all, nuns and musicians, Muslims and Hasids, children sporting infectious grins and others so shy they never raise their heads from their desks.

All are rendered in Ludwig's trademark red, blue and yellow watercolors. Some were planned portraits, but many were people Ludwig espied while riding her bicycle through the city.

She didn't ask any of the subjects to pose, preferring that they go about whatever they were doing while she went about the process of making art.

"When I paint, I am this close to my subject," Ludwig said, standing about 2 feet away. "I painted some jazz musician's friends while they were performing. They were watching me work while they were playing. So I was riffing off them, and they were riffing off me."

"Katherine's work is very expressive," said [Kat Griefen](#), director of the A.I.R. Gallery on W. 25th St. "She has a very special relationship with her subjects, whether she's painting a person or a place. I have almost never seen an artist who has such deep engagement with her subjects and such respect and genuine interest with who they are and depicting that in her work."

Founded in 1972, A.I.R. Gallery is the oldest all-woman gallery in the [U.S.](#) and is devoted to helping emerging artists gain recognition and understanding of the art business.

Ludwig, who is one of six artists doing an 18-month long fellowship at the gallery, will present a show there on May 15 titled "AIRplay," during which she will paint as her friend, legendary jazz musician [Ornette Coleman](#), performs next to her.

"I saw him at the movies and just walked up and said 'Hi, can I come over and paint you?'" she said. "Now he's a mentor to me and a lot of other people. We call ourselves 'Ornette's Babies.'"

Ludwig's painting, "Liberty&ManhattanSkyline1" (she doesn't use spaces in her titles) was recently selected by [Mayor Bloomberg](#)'s office as the theme painting for the upcoming Immigrant Heritage Week festivities at [Gracie Mansion](#).

[Commissioner Guillermo Linares](#) of the [Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs](#) said Ludwig's painting was "reflective of the artistic talent of the many immigrants who come from all over the world to make [New York City](#) their home. The harbor scene is the first thing many immigrants see when they get here. That is why we felt compelled to use it."

Immigrant Heritage Week will kick off with an April 11 reception at Gracie Mansion.

That painting is one of six Ludwig painted in three hours on the [Staten Island](#) docks after taking canvases, her bicycle, her Spider-Man bag of paints and a single brush on the Staten Island ferry.

She was moved to paint the pieces because the view was the first one immigrants saw when entering the city by boat.

"I originally went over there because a friend told me there was this fantastic pizzeria near the Staten Island terminal," she said.

Having her painting selected to illustrate Immigrant Heritage Week was even more special because "I love Mayor Bloomberg," Ludwig said. "He is a completely self-made man, and I try to be a self-made artist."

Ludwig won't tell her age. Well, sort of.

"I am no age," she said. "If I could I'd be no race and no religion. All that stuff is unimportant to an artist. An artist is really just human."

A native Canadian, Ludwig has four college degrees.

While she home schools 12-year-old daughter [Sofia](#) in New York husband Sam, a third grade teacher, watches over daughter Claudia, 17, and 15-year-old twins Charles and Barnett at home in [Toronto](#).

Ludwig paints constantly, and is liable to break out her paints and canvas at a moment's notice, like when she was originally turned down for her visa after winning the A.I.R. Gallery fellowship.

She was able to get a host of artists, politicians and friends to write immigration officials to overturn the visa denial.

In gratitude, Ludwig painted the people who wrote letters on her behalf and called the collection "Art of Welcome: EveryoneWhoHelpedMeGetMy01 Visa."

Many of the faces in that collection now adorn Ludwig's Williamsburg wall. As a rule she doesn't give her subjects physical copies of her work, but will send electronic copies via e-mail.

PIECES she feels don't work or have bad composition are destroyed. Her prices range from \$1,000 for a 10-and-a-quarter-inch by 7-inch portrait to \$10,000 for 40-by-60 inch giant canvases, slightly more if the buyer wants it framed.

Many of Ludwig's larger pieces have musical themes - one centers around the [Tom Petty](#) song, "I Won't Back Down."

Ludwig said she has decided to make "Liberty&ManhattanSkyline" available as a free downloadable screensaver. To claim yours, or see other examples of her work, go to her Web site, www.katherinedolgylludwig.com.

Ludwig will present three shows at A.I.R. Gallery, 511 W. 25th St., on April 17, May 1 and May 8. The A.I.R. Web site is www.airgallery.org.

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