

fine art

INTERVIEW WITH *Patti Bell*

Studio B Custom Framing & Fine Art was established in 1981 by Patti Bell in downtown Lancaster, Ohio after 10 years of employment as a custom framer in Columbus. Patti came to be known as the top framer in Central Ohio and is known across the country for her attention to detail. Her clients include many museums, artists, galleries, and private collectors from Connecticut to California. Patti moved her business to Asheville in October of 2006.

Rapid River Magazine: Could you tell us how you got started in your business, and describe the different types of work that you do?

Patti Bell: I was in a fashion merchandising work/study program in Columbus, Ohio. I got a job at the downtown F & R Lazarus store and eventually ended up in the custom framing department. I had always loved and appreciated art and enjoyed working with my hands so it was a perfect fit. I left there after 3 years to work at another frame shop in Columbus for a man who was very experienced in museum and conservation framing.

After 7 years I decided to start my own custom framing business and in 1990 purchased and refurbished a hundred year old building with 6000 square feet, 3000 of which was gallery space showcasing fine craft. In 2005 I decided I was ready for a change and after considering several arts-focused communities to move to, kept getting drawn back to Asheville. The rest is history!



Patti Bell owner of Studio B Custom Framing & Fine Art, with her pal Luke.

I do the full spectrum of custom framing specializing in museum, conservation, textile and shadowbox framing. I also offer in-home and office consulting on art and framing and do the actual placement and hanging.

RRM: Tell us a little about Studio B — what sort of work do you represent?

PB: The gallery showcases original art by regional and national artists. I have oil paintings by Brennen McElhaney, Stuart Roper and Jim Hefley, fiber landscapes by Andrea Brewer, all from WNC, and porcelain ceramics by Sarah Jaeger of Helena, Montana, jewelry by Amy Jacob, Charlotte, NC and Trudy Springer from Ohio, to name a few.

The current exhibit in the gallery is work by the Appalachian Pastel Society and Andrea Brewer's fiber works will be featured in October for American Craft Week. I am also discussing a future exhibit with Nancy Crow, internationally-known contemporary quilt artist.

RRM: How do you find the artists you represent?

PB: I find artists in several different ways. Most make contact with me by sending images, bio and statement for consideration. If I happen to see an artist whose work I think would be a good fit for the gallery, I'll contact them. Some are referred to me by other artists or people who are familiar with Studio B.



Bell working on a frame.

RRM: How many pieces should an artist have before looking at gallery representation? Framed? Unframed? Is "gallery wrapped" canvas the new black?

I like to see at least a dozen pieces representative of the artist's style. If I am considering the pieces for display in the gallery, they don't necessarily need to be framed. If they are going to hang in the gallery, I want them to be framed neatly and aesthetically pleasing. Since I am a framer, I do prefer to consult with the artist on their framing. The gallery wrap is fine in the gallery but I find a lot of my customers still prefer a frame on their paintings to hang in their homes.

RRM: Oil has traditionally been king of the hill. Do galleries prefer oil? What about more "fragile" media that have to go behind glass: pastel, colored pencil, watercolor?

PB: I suppose some galleries showcase mostly oils but I would rather show a variety of media. I am currently showing pastels and have shown watercolors, mixed media and textile art. My personal passion is for fine craft and I hope to show more of that in the future.

RRM: What elements are most crucial in choosing or designing a frame for a work of art? How do you work with an artist on presentation?

PB: The framing can make or break a work of art. There are certain rules of thumb as far as frame and mat width but most importantly, it's working with someone who's able to visualize the finished product. I feel I've developed a keen eye for color and design over the past 40 years of framing. When working with artists, I try to present the artwork at its optimum best while working within the artist's budget if that's required.

Studio B Custom Framing & Fine Art

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