



ARTS, DOGS

TIME TO PAINT: OLD GREENWICH ARTIST SPECIALIZES IN PET PORTRAITS

MARCH 26, 2014 GREENWICHFREEPRESS [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

By Leslie Yager Karen Schlansky's animal portraits in her Old Greenwich kitchen.

Credit: Leslie Yager

Old Greenwich painter Karen Schlansky always had talent. Last month her pastel “Freedom” was selected for [Greenwich Art Society's 97th Juried exhibition](#) at Bendheim Gallery, which runs through March 28. Yet, as with many young people striking out on their own, or parents making practical decisions for their family, the mother of two grown children had other priorities over the years.

After majoring in art at Skidmore, Schlansky launched a career in business, snagging a spot in the executive buying program at Ohrbach's department stores, where she became a manager and buyer. “I received great training six days a week and two nights a week,” Schlansky said of her time at the store chain, which for decades was a destination for savvy shoppers. From Ohrbach's, Schlansky joined her father and brother in the family leather business where she specialized in the field of deluxe books.

“I got to do a lot of design and be creative,” Schlansky said, adding that one of the books was about China. This sparked a lifelong interest and trips to China, where she explored and immersed herself in the study of Chinese ancient history and culture. As the leather business had an import-export component, Schlansky later parlayed that expertise into importing Asian antiques. Returning to school for a fine arts appraisals certificate, the busy mom started [Rose Court Asian Antiques](#) based from Chappaqua when her children were in middle school.

Schlansky's dog Zoe has served as the inspiration for several paintings. Credit: Leslie Yager

“At that time you could import pieces through Hong Kong,” Schlansky said of her business buying art for clients, many who sought Tang Dynasty horses, camels and ducks. “Because the Chinese believe in the afterlife the wealthy would acquire symbolic pieces to bring fortune to their next life,” Schlansky explained, describing how she would source and place art that reflected customers’ tastes and preferences.

That said, one piece Schlansky selected for a client was not a match, and she is happy for that. In her kitchen, a sculpture of a two-humped camel and its Persian rider is displayed modestly. The simple display belies the 8th century sculpture’s formidable journey through the silk route and through time.

Reflecting on seemingly disparate phases and pursuits in life, Schlansky acknowledges that what seemed unrelated along the way, have indeed come together. Moving from Chappaqua to Old Greenwich, Schlansky is content spending her days painting. “I do need to paint and I miss it if I am not painting or drawing. I love to deal with color and when I paint, it is physical, particularly when I use the palette knife. I paint with my body.” she said adding that she often works with huge canvases.

Schlansky has multiple projects in progress at any one time. “I want to have the freedom and I don’t want to get stuck,” she explained. “If one painting gets too intense, I’ll go to my giraffes, and if the giraffes get too intense, then I’ll go do 20 pushups,” she joked. “This shouldn’t be torture,” she said describing how she creates momentum. The whole reason I’m doing this is because I love it.” Though she has also sold her photography, Schlansky’s focus is on painting. Her specialty is animal portraits. Her dog Zoe is the subject of more than one painting, she often works from the thousands of photos taken of dog walkers in New York and is building a body of work while also accepting commissions for portraits.

Clients send photos of their pets. Schlansky works from these images and creates the personality and beauty of their animal through her painting. She said, Christmas, Hanukkah , Mother’s Day and birthdays keep her busy painting pet portraits which make thoughtful gifts. Visit KarenSchlansky.com for her more information and a tour of Schlansky’s animal portraits.



