

Art & Science 'Like Magic'

By Carol Goodale

In Barbara Postel's unusual paintings of the Delaware River, bold purple, oranges, blacks and deep blues sweep across the canvas. These powerful landscapes reveal the energetic approach to life that has led this Bucks County artist to investigate a broad range of interests.

From the time she was a very small child, Postel engaged in a creative exploration of the world around her. "I had an unlimited supply of art materials," she says. "My father was a driver for a publisher, and brought home huge rolls of paper. I made moving cycloramas, paper dolls, my own toys.

"I would pore over art and science books. I can remember studying pictures of the solar system and pictures of atoms before I could even read."

For Postel, both science and art have been "like magic," and she has studied questions of aesthetics and questions of science with the same imaginative flair. "The more you know about anything, the more creative you can be," says Postel, who has been the recipient of a McDowell Scholarship as well as the winner of the New York State Physics Award.

Her portraits, which she calls her "cartoons," reflect Postel's lively and humorous approach to life. Her dumpy bathers, her self-

portrait, her painting of her aunts are roughly sketched figures in bright colors. The amusing elements of these appealing paintings are deepened by the range of



expressive faces that Postel captures.

"A lot of my life is a cartoon," says Postel with a laugh. Her studio closets are filled with collections of old photos, costumes, toys and a variety of items she culls from auctions. Her playful involvement with the world leads her to call herself "the oldest break dancer in the world."

Balanced against this lighter side are her intense experiences of communion when she paints her river, water, stone and cloud works. "These are totally spiritual," she says. "When I work on these I lose myself. I call it a rapture. These are moments of

Continued on page...2

Continued from page...1
rapture."

Barbara's quest for new means to express her ideas has taken her to Philadelphia, where she earned an associates degree in architectural design and technology. Her project for this course at the American Institute of Drafting involved complete designs for the studio and home where she now lives. "All we had was a shell. I designed the entire building, including electrical layouts and plumbing layouts. Then we built the whole place ourselves."

Currently represented by the Blackburn and Yates Gallery in Frenchtown, New Jersey, Postel studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and the Art Students League in New York. *Art News Magazine* said of her solo exhibition at the Art Students League, "She can paint anything as expertly as anyone."

Postel has also studied at the Academie Julian in Paris and the San Fernando Academy in Madrid, and received a patrons award for painting at the 1980 Philips Mill exhibition in Bucks County,



Pennsylvania.

Production of a series of videos featuring her paintings and original musical compositions is another form of expression to which her interest in technology have led her. Postel has also worked with computer graphics and color photography.

Because of her interest in many forms of artistic creation, Postel considers herself a "trans-artist" whose refusal to recognize boundaries draws her into many fields.

Her early interest in mathematics and physics enabled her to work in disciplines which "bring order out of chaos." Her invention of a fluid glazing shutter for architectural use garnered a New York State Physics Award, and her early studies at City College were awarded a scholarship for work in nuclear physics.

Her life has not always been easy, and for many years she struggled against financial and physical difficulties. Of her early struggles to integrate her powerful creative drive, Postel says, "I learned to deal with negativity in a positive way. I can turn obstacles into positive experiences."

Today, in a studio filled with pens and paints, brushes and pencils, and overflowing with canvases, she translates her ideas into evocative paintings.

Dark swirls shot through with streaks of light capture her impressions of a stormy sky; broiling waves of color render her relationship to rocks and water; perky faces reveal her humorous approach to portraiture.

For the viewer, these paintings offer an opportunity to share in the magic world of this energetic artist. ■