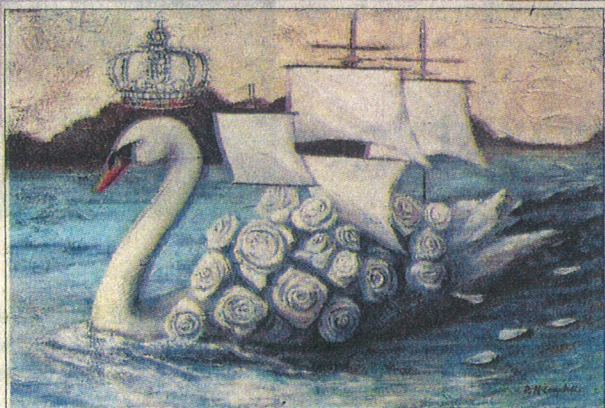


Rachael McCampbell at The District Gallery in Bearden



Rachael McCampbell's oil painting "The Swan" was inspired by a poem by Mary Oliver.

Rachael McCampbell: *Painting poetry on canvas*

By Anne Hart

The dreamy paintings of Knoxville native Rachael McCampbell cover much of the sunny, inviting spaces at The District Gallery in Bearden right now. They're a veritable feast for the eye.

Attached to the wall, next to each, is a poem – the poem that inspired that particular painting – that tells its story.

In one of the paintings, an elegant swan, much of its body composed of white roses, glides across multi-hued blue waters. This image is inspired by Mary Oliver's poem "The Swan," which speaks of the graceful bird as "an armful of white blossoms" and ends by asking, "And did you feel it, in

your heart, how it pertained to everything? And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for? And have you changed your life?"

Painting has certainly changed Rachael McCampbell's life, but it took a while to get there, and it traveled a circuitous route.

The daughter of the late Dr. Bruce McCampbell and his wife, Faye, Rachael grew up in South Knoxville and graduated from Doyle High School and the University of Georgia. It was at Georgia that she met famous Italian fashion designer Emilio Pucci, who many decades earlier had been a student there.

Pucci hired her to work for him for a year in his

design studio in Italy. Afterward, in New York, she worked in art galleries and for an illustrator. Following a yearlong educational program at Christie's in London, she moved to Los Angeles to work in the gallery business, married, had a son and divorced.

Painting for a living was not a possibility at that time.

"I had a son to support," McCampbell says, "and I had to think about how I could earn money, so I worked as a commercial artist. I really wanted to be painting all that time, but I couldn't support my son doing that. I had joined a group of other painters, and we were selling some, and about that time, the illustration world changed, with the introduction of PhotoShop and Internet art. So I started changing, too – doing more fine art."

She wrote some articles that sold and got involved in the healing arts, focusing on helping to facilitate healing in others through yoga and other therapies. Eventually she realized, "I was trying to do too much. I needed to focus on my passion: art."

McCampbell's son, Madison Ruppert, is now 23 years old and a college graduate headed to seminary next.

Mom paints full-time now.

About six years ago, Rachael moved back to Tennessee, settling near Nashville and focusing full-time on her art. Her first major production was a series of paintings of endangered species. A percentage of those sales benefitted the Land Trust for Tennessee. Since then she has done an equine series, one of women in mythology and others. Her work is increasingly in demand.

Her show at The District Gallery, 5113 Kingston Pike, has been a major success, according to Gallery owners Denise and Jeff Hood.

"We had a huge crowd for opening night," Denise says, "and we expect even more people on Thursday night. We are so happy to have Rachael back home for this show. Her work is quite beautiful and very popular."

Mark your calendar. From 7 to 8 p.m. this coming Thursday, the artist will be on hand to discuss her work, including reading the lovely, thought-provoking poems that inspired this collection, titled – appropriately – "Dreamscapes." You don't want to miss it.

Information: www.TheDistrictGallery.com or 200-4452.