

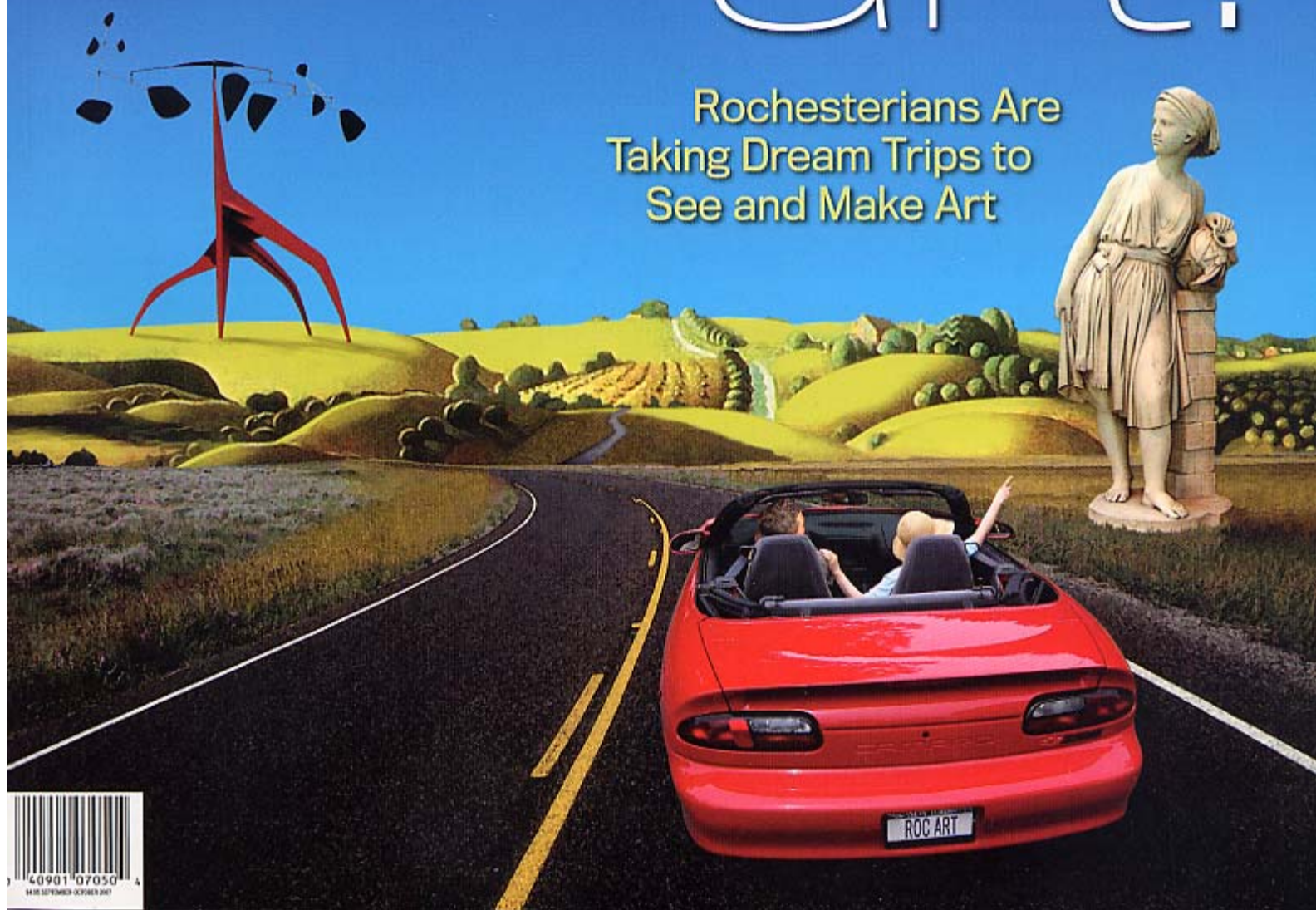
Rochester

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MAGAZINE

Adventures in art!

Rochesterians Are
Taking Dream Trips to
See and Make Art





DRAWING INSPIRATION.

Students of "g.a." Sheller have discovered their inner artists on dream trips to places such as this spot in Monte Bianco, Italy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF G.A. SHELLER

Adventures

in

Art

by **Melissa F. Pheterson**

Want to paint in Provence? Bop around in Santa Fe with artists and art historians? Get an insider's invitation to a private collector's cocktail party?

Rochesterians are combining their love of art and travel in unique trips and workshops. Thinking outside the frame has brought rewards to these adventurous spirits.

Art's a journey—just take a look.

Passports and paintbrushes

Becoming an artist means opening your eyes to the world around you. Sometimes, it also means opening the world to your eyes.

Pittsford artist and instructor “g.a.” Sheller plans and conducts workshops in inspiring settings such as Provence, Tuscany and Scotland. Every year, she leads an entourage of art-minded adventurers—many from Rochester—through a week of “en plein air” painting and drawing in stimulating scenery.

Sheller says her students range from “people who’ve never picked up a pencil to college art professors” who work in an equally diverse range of media: graphite, pen and ink, watercolor, oil, acrylic, pastels. By now, with more than a decade’s worth of workshops under her belt, Sheller has earned a reputation for supreme organization and insightful critique.

Of course, critique goes down easy when you’re in paradise. Lee Schueller,

a bookkeeper in Pittsford and novice artiste, joined the Tuscany workshop in spring 2005, intrigued more by sightseeing than sketching.

“g.a. told me that anybody can learn to draw, and I always challenged that,” says Schueller. Through drawing exercises and guided technique, teacher proved student wrong.

“By the end of the week, sure enough, I knew how to draw,” admits Schueller. She wasn’t exactly ready to exhibit in Florence. But *la vita italiana* helped coax out her inner da Vinci. “Each town was more scenic than the next,” she says. “When you come away, you really feel you’ve inhaled the Tuscan atmosphere, the culture; it’s become a part of you.”

Sheller, a landscape artist who specializes in a unique synthesis of watercolor and photography, is represented by Renaissance Gallery and the Pat Rini Rohrer Gallery in Canandaigua. Her overseas workshops

“evolved by happenstance” and word-of-mouth, she says.

In the 1990s, during her travels, she met people with connections at overseas art schools who invited her to be an artist-in-residence on the Isle of Mull, Scotland, and to teach at a workshop in Ireland. The idea of a “destination lesson” took hold: Making art in picturesque places made perfect sense.

After scouting out sites while teaching in Ireland, Sheller began to work with a trip organizer to develop a workshop in Greece.

“My reputation sort of grew,” she says. So did the offers and opportunities, some impossible to resist. One woman in Scotland generously offered to host Sheller and a group of students in her castle. This past June, Sheller traveled to Provence with 12 painters and two spouses in tow, along with the trip planner and her husband who doubled as van chauffeurs to shuttle the artists to



PHOTO COURTESY OF G.A. SHELLE

LEARNING EXPERIENCE. "g.a" Sheller critiques her students' work.



PHOTO COURTESY OF G.A. SHELLE

the countryside.

Even non-artists enjoy these trips, absorbing a heightened appreciation for scenic vistas. "They know, on a trip like this, they will see and experience an area like they would in no other way," says Sheller. "Seeing through an artist's eyes is a very visual, sensory experience. You'll be on the bus and hear someone shout, 'Look at that purple field! Look how the light hits that building!'"

And no Best Westerns for these folks: Sheller books the group for a seven-to-ten-day stay at a manor, inn or castle. After brief morning instruction, she and the group depart for the destination du jour, scattering to "find their own imagery" among antique stores, abbeys and olive trees. They often tote a picnic lunch, lovingly packed with fresh produce by the lady of the manor or local growers.

Sometimes her students wander afield to pop in on local artisans. As her students seek their muses, Sheller seeks

her students ("I always hope I can find them all"), making the rounds to peek at their sketches and make sure "they're not floundering about."

Sheller herself doesn't paint on vacation, leaving the creations to her students. But, she adds, "I'm not a taskmaster. My primary concern is that they have a good time; the second, that they learn something."

When it rains—think Ireland—the students duck indoors to paint (Irish pubs offer their share of inspiration, too). Come evening, the group gathers for dinners featuring the best of the region's food and wine.

"The trips are a nice mix—a little painting, a little shopping, sightseeing," says Connie Mauro of Rochester, who has traveled with Sheller to Ireland, Provence and Santa Fe. "It's all-encompassing—much better than working in a studio. And g.a. tends to bring out the best in everyone."

PHOTO COURTESY OF G.A. SHELLE



BIRTH OF AN IDEA. Scotland is where Sheller first conceived of her art trips.



PHOTO COURTESY OF G.A. SHELTER

LANDSCAPE ESCAPE. Sheller's students are free to roam until they find the perfect spot for their work. This one happens to be outside a chalet in Scotland.



FROM THE TEACHER. "Ireland Moors", by "g.a." Sheller, was inspired by this scene (opposite page) on one of her art trips.

PHOTO COURTESY OF G.A. SHELTER



PHOTO COURTESY OF G.A. SHELTER

LA DOLCE VITA. Nancy Panfill of Victor works on a study of the old streets of Verucula, Italy.

So do the locales. Though tepid about antique shops back here at home, Mauro felt compelled to pick up her brush amidst the displays at European shops. "I found lots of interesting vignettes, lovely compositions of merchandise," she recalls.

Kristen Malone, a Rochester artist who teaches at Mercy High School, fulfilled a lifelong travel dream when she joined Sheller's group in Ireland 13 years ago. She found inspiration in the countryside and also in the pearls of wisdom that Sheller shared over group meals.

"I have kept everything I painted," says Malone, including scenes of lace-curtained windows she viewed while sitting in a car for warmth. "Several works are on my bedroom walls, framed and hung. They're really significant paintings to me."

For teacher and student, developing such connections to their art is extremely gratifying. In Provence, Sheller helped an 84-year-old woman discover drawing ability that had been latent all her life. "She was amazed, and so was I," Sheller says.

It helps explain why her students, once on board for the adventure, tend to ask: "So where are we going next year?"

Sheller also runs "en plein air" classes in Canandaigua—so you don't have to board a plane to have an art adventure with her. In fall 2008, an exhibition of work done by students in her overseas workshops will open at the Pat Rini Rohrer Gallery in Canandaigua. For more information, visit www.gasheller.com

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