

pre view

MASSACHUSETTS

may 2016

people

Linda Post

Co-founding Director, Paradise City Arts Festival

BY JAMES HEFLIN

The Paradise City Arts Festival visits Northampton twice a year, and Marlborough twice a year. Linda Post and her husband, Geoff, both artists, started the Festival in 1995. Northampton shows take place at the Three Country Fairgrounds, and offer artwork, food, and entertainment. Linda's artwork — paintings, pastels, and monotypes — can be found at the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College, the Boston Public Library, and other public and private collections, and has appeared in *American Artist*, the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe*.

James Heflin: The Festival's roster includes fine artists and more craft-oriented artisans — what do you look for in exhibitors?

Linda Post: We look for originality, technical excellence and a clear personal vision. We curate for diversity in aesthetics, media and price range. We are always open to new and emerging artists. When Paradise City Arts Festivals first began, the percentage of "fine art" versus "fine craft" was definitely skewed more toward the "fine craft" end. But over the years we have attracted many more painters, printmakers, sculptors, and photographers who found great success at our events. The public has been especially enthusiastic about the large-scale sculpture at our shows. But I think that all categories — from jewelry to furniture to paintings — have found an audience and a market at Paradise City.

JH: How did the Festival get started?

LP: Both my husband and I were practicing artists who spent twenty years on the show circuit ourselves. Making a living as a practicing artist is no easy thing. Being creative in your studio, coming up with a body of work that excites you, hoping that customers will respond... then you have to pack it all up and bring it to a show! But you're still not done. You need to put on your marketing hat and connect with your customers and display your work in a way that people will respond to.

After talking about it for years, we decided to try putting our years of practice and observations to work in a new career. We wanted to put together an event that was different, that combined the beauty and quality of a high-end indoor show with the best parts — great food, live music, outdoor sculpture spaces, and indoor exhibit booths — of an arts festival. We wanted it to be beautiful, festive and fun, an event that would appeal to a broad audience without sacrificing excellence.

JH: How does it differ now from when it began?

LP: The Festival has grown from a 150-artist event housed in a single building on the Northampton Fairgrounds to 260 exhibiting artists in four buildings, a permanent sculpture garden, a paved center courtyard, and a huge music and dining tent.

JH: Was there a moment you knew the Fest was destined to be a success?

LP: That first year of Paradise City was a more beautiful show than any first-year event should be. After all, we had spent the previous twenty years as artists. The many loyal friends we made in the art and craft worlds traveled from all over the country to exhibit their work and make this into a first-class event. They also helped us spread the word, and the crowds appeared, driving for hours to see the show.

It was in our third year that I think the Festival truly "arrived." We already had lots of loyal patrons. Then we were covered by the



PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDA POST

New York Times, the *Globe*, *Yankee Magazine* — and the Valley ran out of hotel rooms, the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau was frantically calling hotels in the Berkshires and Connecticut for availability, and the aisles were packed with visitors from just about everywhere.

JH: What are some highlights of the Fest for you?

LP: Geoff and I are serious collectors ourselves, so we usually spend the quiet hours before opening walking the show and contemplating purchases from our artists.

JH: You're both practicing artists — what kind of artwork do you pursue?

LP: I mostly work on large-scale figurative paintings in my studio when I'm not working at Paradise City. Some of my recent work can be seen at R. Michelson Galleries in downtown Northampton or on my website www.LHPost.com. Geoff's creative outlet now is landscape gardening and stonework.

JH: How has doing the Fest affected your work and life as an artist?

LP: There's much less time in my studio. Paradise City, with four events and two magazines to produce annually is a pretty full-time job. But one of my favorite parts of directing Paradise City is my role as mentor to up-and-coming artists just starting to exhibit in our shows. I taught pastels, printmaking, and figure drawing for many years, so I guess it's a continuation of that part of my life.

JH: Is the Fest your livelihood? Is it a tough job?

LP: By our third year, it became our livelihood. And it does get easier with time. But sometimes I feel a bit like a juggler — for every event you produce there are so many balls in the air, hundreds of details that have to fall into place. In fact, you could compare running an arts fair to planning a wedding, but imagine preparing the venue and reception for nearly 300 brides and grooms and their guests all at once.

JH: What brought you to the Valley?

LP: We moved to Northfield in 1975, and to Northampton in 1982. It was an exciting time, just at the beginning of Northampton's emergence as an arts community. We lived right on Main Street for almost ten years. As artists, we could have lived just about anywhere. I think it was the high concentration of artists in the Valley, the beauty of the landscape and the affordable housing that brought us here. And I'm a New England girl.

JH: What keeps you here?

LP: All of the things that brought us here to begin with are still true. This is a great community. It somehow combines the advantages of a city — art, music, performances, intellectual stimulation — with the quiet beauty of rural life.