

No Shrinking Violet

As a foreign correspondent for movie magazines in post-WWII Brazil and Italy, Violet Parkhurst shared American culture with an international audience. As a world renowned seascape artist, she continues her cross-cultural exchange, most recently with China when she was invited to present President Hu Jintao with one of her works in July. This is her second invitation to China. She is the first Western artist to have presented her work to a Chinese president and to have it displayed in the Great Hall of the People and the China National Museum of Fine Arts.

"It all began when I was on a TV program celebrating the 30th anniversary of President Nixon's opening the doors to China in 2002," she says. "Wu Kang Li, the Chairman of the World American Cultural Exchange, was on the same program and he was impressed that four U.S. Presidents [Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and George Bush] owned my work. When he heard that President Nixon had one of my paintings, he was so excited. The next day, whoosh! I was invited to fly to China, all expenses paid, first class."

A delegation of 30 from Parkhurst's church accompanied her for this opportunity of a lifetime, where the artist was celebrated in Beijing with her own motorcade, a welcoming banquet

and visits to the Forbidden City, the Great Wall and an arts college.

On her 2002 trip, Parkhurst presented "Washington Pines" and "Moonlight" to then-President Jiang Zemin. In July, President Hu Jintao received "A Bridge of Friendship," which depicts a ship flying the Chinese flag sailing towards a lighthouse displaying an American flag. As she was unable to make the journey, Wu, an avid collector of Parkhurst's work, presented the painting.

The Vermont native has lived in Southern California for over 40 years. Her work has been collected by five U.S. presidents and local and international leaders including former California Gov. Peter Wilson, The Honorable Mayor of Kobe, Japan and the late King Faud of Saudi Arabia. Parkhurst also enjoys a coterie of fans in Hollywood, including Stephanie Powers, James Arness and Angela Lansbury. Two of her seascapes were presented in the Prado and the Louvre and are now in the permanent collection of the Stockholm Museum.

"Violet is about as famous as any artist can be," says Derek Takeuchi, Takeuchi, Hsiao & Mirosevic (THM) Gallery, who has known Parkhurst for more than 20 years. "And she has the personality and character to go along with it. It's an entire package."

Parkhurst, who has been the subject of several books on painting and has taught over the years, still regards her talent as "this gift. I really feel that I've been blessed.


"Not that I'm that religious, but I always say a prayer before I do a painting and I'll tell you why," she explains. "I look at this simple little hand, and I think, 'How could I do all those paintings?' I don't know, I just know



that since I was six years old, I knew I'd be an artist. I'll be painting and I'll see the whole thing finished and it's almost like angels or some power helps me. I thank God all the time for giving me this gift."

Although Parkhurst has painted animals and nudes, it is her stature as a seascape painter that has made her a success story. Her choice of San Pedro as home and home base for her gallery business evinces her love of the sea and its stature as a source of inspiration for artists.

Parkhurst is represented by Parkhurst Art Galleries in Ports o' Call Village; Violet Parkhurst Gallery in Newport Beach, a partnership with THM Gallery; and by the flagship location of THM Gallery in San Pedro.

"A benchmark in our success was that an internationally renowned artist would say, 'Take everything my reputation, take my work and run with it.' That's an amazing accomplishment for a company like THM," notes Warren Hsiao, THM. 

Article by Joanie Harmon, courtesy of THM Gallery

