

Look again: Art is much the same as the real thing

By S. Derrickson Moore
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LAS CRUCES — Kim Carpenter's creations inspire double-takes. At first glance, many people are sure she's a photographer. Her images of spiky ocotillo blooming against a bright blue sky, sun-dappled, richly textured adobe, intricately patterned rugs and other Southwestern scenes, all seem like the work of a lens maestro.

When they learn she's a painter, Carpenter said, "People seem to be very surprised," and drawn to take a second look.

"It's the neatest thing to watch them because they stop dead in their tracks, almost like they're startled. It's fun to watch. Once they figure out that they aren't photographs, they have to get their minds set a different way and look at them again," she said.

Her abilities are all the more remarkable because she did not start to paint "seriously," she said, until recently.

"I grew up in Casper, Wyo., where rock hounding, fly fishing and exploring occupied my summers," Carpenter said. "I honestly did not paint a picture until the year 2000. I dabbled with different kinds of art but nothing very serious. My mom is an artist, and when we were kids, she taught us some of the basics, like the color wheel and vanishing points."

She took college courses in photography and earned a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Denver. She pursued her interest in photography and enjoyed an eclectic career.

"I was a vet tech for a while in Seattle and I worked in a hardware store, which was kind of fun. There was a lot of problem solving and I liked to be around all the people."

She was inspired to paint during vacations in the Southwest.

"I moved here about two and a half years ago. I had back surgery and the weather in Seattle was not conducive to recovery. I found that I can paint here and the most important thing is to be able to stand up in front of an easel and get the job done."

She said the Land of Enchantment reminds her of her child-



hood Wyoming home.

"It's a lot like Casper, without all the snow. I really fell in love with New Mexico and in Las Cruces, it seems like every single person I've met wants to help you. I haven't met a bad person down here."

She has tried other media. I painted some furniture and sold it and did a sandpainting on a blanket box with colored sand and figured out a way to make it stick."

She began to experiment with painting subjects and techniques.

"I like to see chunks of things. That almost makes things a little surreal if you don't know what the whole is, like a painting of Taos Pueblo as a vertical image. Most of the paintings you see are horizontal images of the whole pueblo. I also like the juxtaposition of something man-made in between something that isn't, like a windmill and water trough in the middle of the desert. I'm really interested in blocks of color that end up looking almost like abstractions."

Painting, for her, is a painstaking process.

"There is a lot of detail. Each painting takes at least two weeks and 'Puerto Penasco,' the one with all the rugs, took me three months," she said.

She takes photographs of subjects that interest her and works in acrylics.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Southwestern and Borderland subjects inspire Kim A. Carpenter's vividly realistic paintings and tiles. Shown here are "Ocotillo I" and "Rugs Puerto Penasco."

"As a newcomer to the Southwest, she has been quick to see and capture the essence of the region. Because she paints interesting vignettes of subjects rather than the subjects as a whole I feel as though I'm standing in the location rather than looking at a scene," said Jim Turrentine, owner of The Big Picture and Main Street Gallery on the Downtown Mall.

Carpenter has worked with Turrentine to develop giclée prints of her work which are mounted on canvas.

"He also formats prints for me for tiles and at that point, another group takes over and runs the images through an 8-color printer on transfer paper, which is put on tile with a heat press and a dye sublimation process through which ink is absorbed into an actual tile," she said.

She would like to put together an exhibition of her works, Carpenter said. "But I haven't been able to yet. One of the problems is



that it takes me quite a while to paint a picture and I'm selling them as fast as I can paint them."

Inspiration is no problem.

"I have all kinds of ideas of places I want to go and things I want to see and paint. This is an amazing place. I love to paint. I don't see myself doing anything but this. I think I've

See her work ▶▶

- **What:** Kim Carpenter's art at the Las Cruces Farmers & Crafts Market
- **When:** 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays
- **Where:** Las Cruces Downtown Mall
- **Plus:** Sometimes at Mesilla Mercado, Noon to 4 p.m. Sundays, Mesilla Plaza
- **Info:** kacarpenterart@aol.com, 526-1290

found my calling."

She's in the process of developing a Web site, but right now, the best places to see her work are at the Las Cruces Farmers and Crafts Market Wednesday and Saturday mornings on the Downtown Mall and occasionally at the Mesilla Mercado, from noon to 4 p.m. Sunday on the Mesilla Plaza.

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