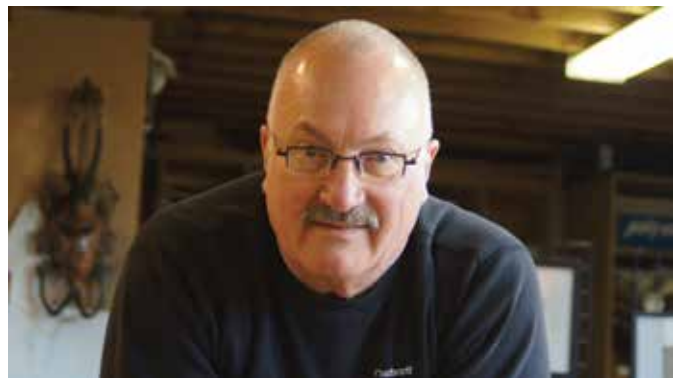
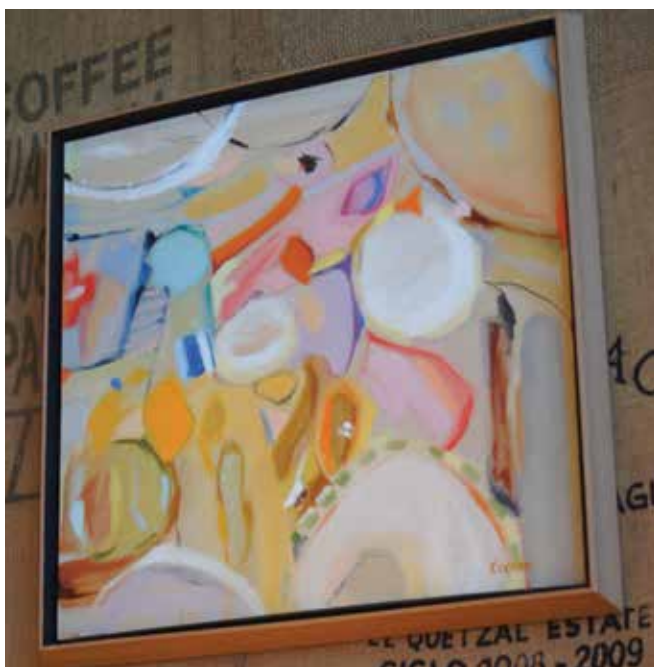


A HUB FOR Leawood Arts Group

At StudioQ, Lori Keenan and other local artists support—and urge one another—to stretch their creativity.



ARTICLE KATHERINE BONTRAGER | PHOTOGRAPHY 4 FT PHOTOZ



There's something about Robert Quackenbush's no-nonsense New York honesty that can bring out the best in an artist. It's for this reason that local artists, such as Lori Keenan, trek to Quackenbush's StudioQ, where he pushes people out of their comfort zones and into new artistic territory.

Keenan first made her way to StudioQ, nestled in Quackenbush's airy basement, more than six years ago.

"After graduating from KU in 1983 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts, I worked for Hallmark for about eight years before quitting to raise a family with my husband, Matt. But I needed the creative outlet, so I

continued to take painting and ceramic courses at the Art Institute. I started painting with oils about five years ago, focusing on realistic portraits, impressionistic landscapes and abstract still-life paintings. I find myself inspired by artists such as de Kooning, Bonnard, Morandi and Rothko.”

Keenan took an abstract painting class at Mission Farm’s now-shuttered Artichokes (it has recently relocated to the West Bottoms) taught by Quackenbush, and she’s been a member of his studio ever since.

It was at his insistence that Keenan put aside the pictures she’d often used for inspiration and began to experiment with more abstract forms. What resulted were canvases covered in organic circular shapes in soothing pastel hues.

“There’s a difference between making paintings and making art,” Quackenbush says. “When Lori began venturing into these more abstract shapes, I knew she’d hit it. I stare at these canvases and see something different every time I look at them.”

Keenan’s work has been recently showcased at the Take 5 Coffee + Bar off of 151st Street. The work was so well received that Keenan sold four pieces—much to the delight of her supporters at StudioQ. The group of between 10 and 15 disciplined artists join Quackenbush to make use of the sunlight studio once a week. Lined with eastward-facing windows, the space has a definite energy to it, and it’s become the hub to a close-knit arts community.

“There’s no competition,” Quackenbush says. “But we all critique and encourage each other. I really try to get the artists who work here to bridge their heart and their head when it comes to their art. When they get it just right, you can see the freedom. They come out of the thing exhausted but elated.”

Quackenbush’s own art covers several disciplines—painting, printmaking, and sculpting. “Each discipline feeds on the others. Much of my work tends to be experimental.”

It’s that no-holds-barred creativity that helps lead other local artists to their own successes.

“My growth as an artist comes, not only from my daily practice of painting, but from having the ability work side by side with other artists,” Keenan admits. “It’s important to be able to have a dialogue

with artists so that you can share your ideas and experiences; explore solutions to solving painting problems; and, critique each other’s work.

“We often take field trips to museums and galleries. One I really enjoyed was a visit to Tom Corbin’s sculpture studio. Every once in a while, we’ll paint all day at Robert’s and enjoy a nice lunch prepared by Robert and his wife, Merry.”

Quackenbush sees his studio as just one of the many signs of Kansas City’s exploding art scene.

“New and exciting opportunities for local visual artists are everywhere,” he says. “The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, the addition of the Bloch Building at the Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, the Kemper Museum and many new art galleries. What this means is that we have more places to see work and explore the chance to have our own work shown. Special opportunities exist like the Artist Inc program, the Charlotte Street Foundation, ArtsKC, Kansas City Artists Coalition, the Kansas City Art Institute and the new Inter-Urban ArtHouse. And let’s not forget the local support we get from people like Lori Chandler at Take 5 Coffee + Bar.”

Keenan agrees wholeheartedly. “I am so fortunate to paint with a very talented group of artists. Participating in StudioQ has helped me find the inspiration and encouragement to successfully explore the challenging world of creating abstract paintings.”

To see a sampling of Keenan’s work, visit LoriKeenan.com. For more information on Quackenbush and StudioQ, visit ArtByQ.com.

