

élan

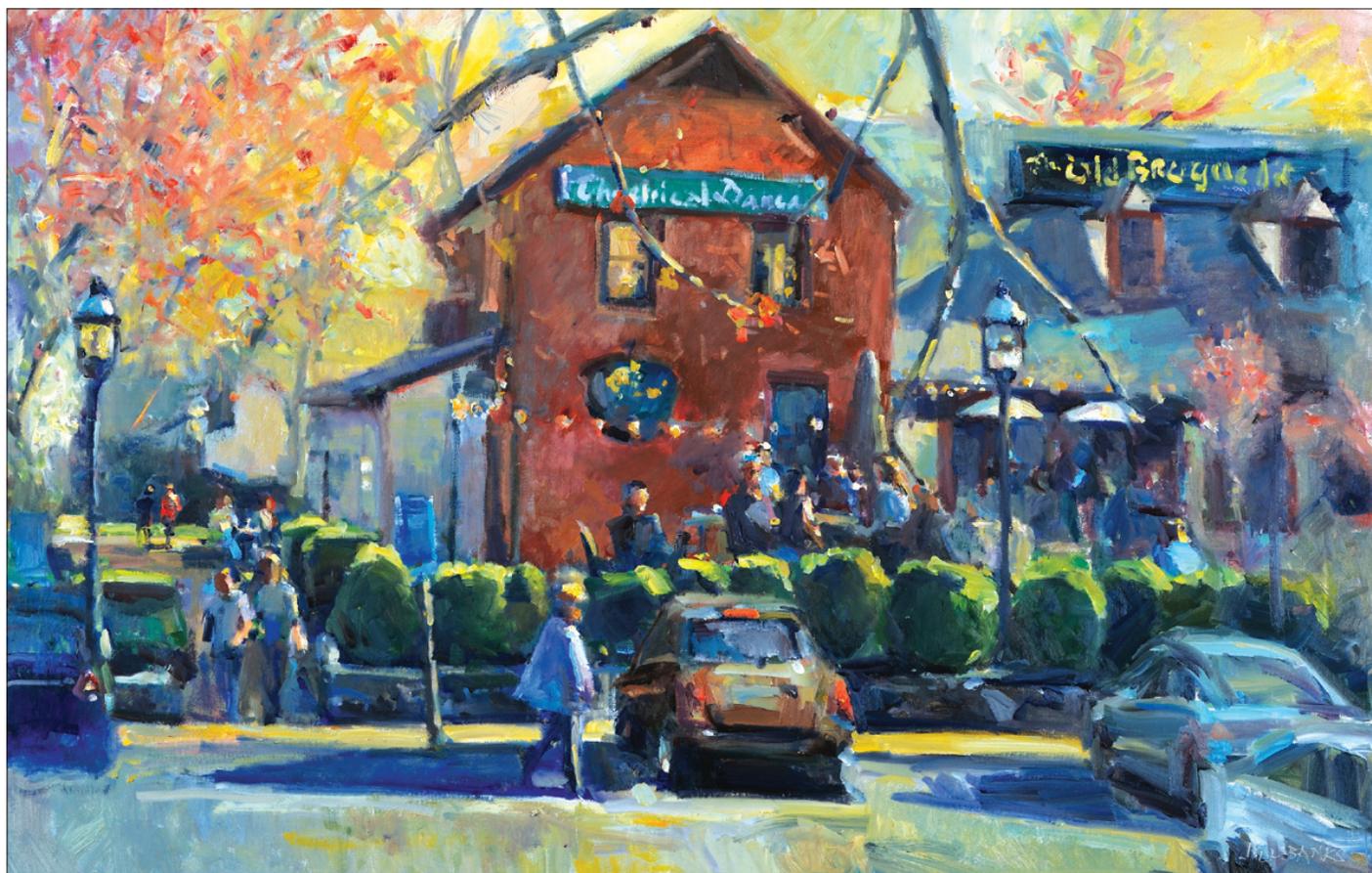
CELEBRATING THE ARTS | AUGUST 2020



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August 2020

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On the cover: "Two for Tea," 20" x 16"; and above "Spring Gathering," 24" x 36". Both are oil on linen-lined panel by Jill Banks

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ART IN THE FIRST PERSON

Everybody Knows Your Name

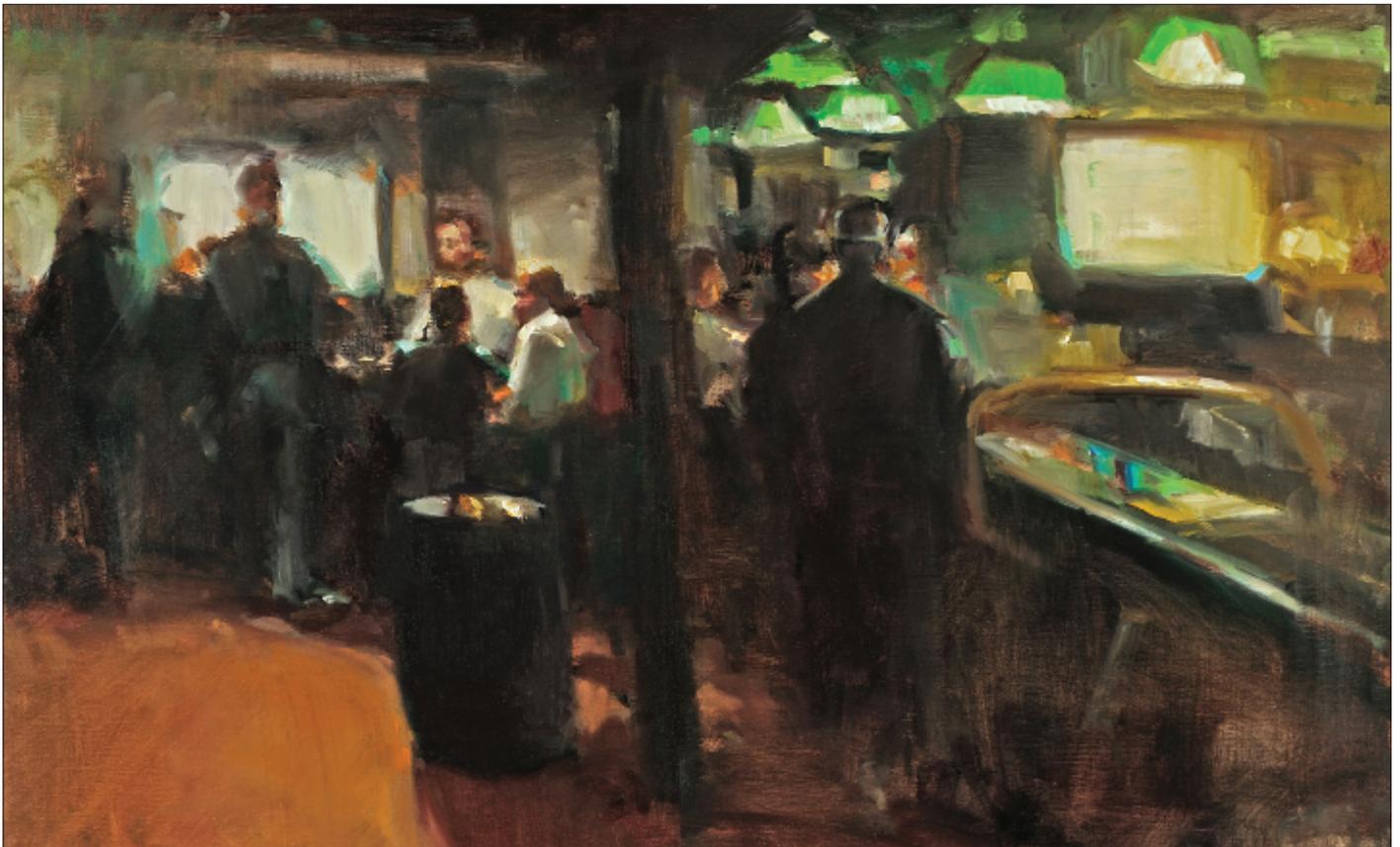
THANKING THE OLD BROGUE IRISH PUB | BY JILL BANKS



Jill Banks

One of my major worries when this pandemic first struck was how do we preserve those beautiful aspects of our everyday life before it: the restaurants we love to visit, people whom we love to see, businesses that we work for or rely upon. One in particular I fretted about is the Old Brogue Irish Pub, the Great Falls equivalent of the Cheers Bar and a gathering place for decades. It's a big business with a huge heart, part of so much good within the community and beyond.

The Brogue is a couple of doors down from my joint studio at the Artists' Atelier in the Village Centre. Even before I took up painting, my husband Randy and I shared family dinners with our then young kids there. It's the connection between this place and my art that are the subject of a long thank you note I sent recently to the Brogue's owner and Great Falls unofficial mayor, Mike Kearney. Now, as élan's "Artist in the First Person," I'm publishing that letter (also posted on my website blog at www.JillBanks.com) here.





Page 00: "More Cars and Coffee,"
(detail), 12" x 24"

Page 00: "Ladies' Lunch," 16" x 20"

Opposite, top: "Colleen's Boys," 16" x 20" and
"Irish Pub," 18" x 24"

Above: "The Brogue," 30" x 40"
All are oil on linen-lined panel.

Dear Mike,

I'm so grateful for the huge impact that showing my work at the Brogue has had on my career as an artist and connection to the community. I think I was the first or second artist showing in the Snuggery, way back when ... but the gathering spot you've built was a huge inspiration even before then. "The Brogue" was the postcard cover image for my first solo show at the Art League in Alexandria, when I was one of 10 artists out of 1,000+ members chosen to take over the solo room for a month. That painting was based on photographs taken at a private event in the Snuggery (when it still had the bar and dark paneling).

This month, my painting "Ladies' Lunch," of my Mom and her friends celebrating a birthday group lunch in Katie's while my art hung there for the month, is featured in three major national art magazines: *Art of the West*, *Southwest Art* and *Fine Art Connoisseur*. That's unbelievable, made all the more amazing since none of those placements were paid for by me. The painting was selected for an exhibition by Women

Artists of the West (WAOW, of which I'm a signature member) that was scheduled to take place in Dubois, Wyoming, then because of the pandemic was switched to an online-only exhibit. The promotions chair for WAOW designed an ad for the organization with only two paintings featured out of the hundreds in the show: "Ladies' Lunch" was one of them, appearing in this month's *Art of the West* magazine.

In talking to the WAOW organizer, I learned that that the painting really resonated with what the organization is all about: women supporting women.

For me, this painting is special because it is set in the Brogue, a place strongly ingrained in my memory for all the good, and there's my Mom, who "sneakingly" made sure her friends were exposed to my art for a long, leisurely, wonderful lunch.

OTHER RELATED ART STORIES:

Whenever I meet local persons, they invariably tell me they recognize my work from having seen it in the Brogue. There's an instant connection, and they saw it in an environment that's just how I'd



hope they'd experience it. Warm, homey, happy.

My first time painting people from life, without their being a model asked/hired to be still was "Tea for Two," painted with permission in the Snuggery while these two friends were having tea. After they finished, I stayed in the dining room for hours, painting the walls, tablescapes, etc.

This painting planted the seeds for my "100 Faces in 100 Days Project" and also immediately led to my painting "Colleen's Boys." Colleen had been in the Snuggery writing on her laptop while I was painting "Tea for Two" and asked: if her three sons showed up there on a certain day that week, would I paint them? I agreed to the commission, although I was in the middle of one of our many moves. It took a bit of time and scrounging around to get organized to paint that day, and by the time I was sort of ready, all the smoothies and food had pretty much been consumed and it was a struggle to keep the three contained for long. Still turned out.

I painted in the bar one day during one of my shows, and it turns out that one of my subjects in the painting was David. When Marjorie, David's wife, whom I had not met yet, caught word of the painting, she immediately called me to purchase it as a surprise gift. It was presented during his big birthday party in the Snuggery where it was allowed to sit for the evening on the mantel. This has led to an incredible friendship with Marjorie who has a Jill Banks-roomful of art, including "Spring Gathering, Great Falls," one of the big pieces I painted *plein air* on the hill, which was published on the cover of the Celebrate Great Falls Annual Schedule of Events.

There have been many "Cars and Coffee"-inspired paintings, including one painted last year on the Atelier porch. I even painted out back for "St. Patrick's Day"—*plein air*—at a little distance from the green beer, just in case.

The toll this pandemic is taking everywhere is unfathomable and you, Mike, are taking the lion's share of

Above: "The Brogue Bar," 18" x 24"

Opposite, top: "The Snuggery," 18" x 24"; and St. Patrick's Day," 12" x 16.
All are oil on linen-lined panel.



the load in keeping alive this business of yours that's a centerpiece for the community. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you do for all of us. If there's a way to return those decades of kindness, let me know. This story of how you have helped shape the trajectory of my career and fit so well with my favorite subject is pretty amazing. I hope that it can help in some way.

Again, huge, huge, huge thanks!

I truly hope that the Old Brogue and other businesses that are at the heart of our communities find the continued support that they need from all of us who are able. Help means patronage, conversations, guidance, thanks, willingness to pay higher prices to cover increased costs, connecting, checking in ... and whatever else we can come up with. It also means being completely responsible in keeping those on the front lines and patrons around you safe. Mask use, distancing, personal care, self quarantining if exposed to risks. That alone can relieve a lot of stress.