

LIFESTYLES



Open Studios really a journey into the artist's mind.

by Rick Polito

From the outside, the creative process looks like a mystery. What happens at the intersection of inspiration and realization is rarely clear to the non-artist.

During open studios, the non-artists are invited inside that process.

An open studio is an open invitation.

Over the next two weekends, two different communities of artists at opposite ends of Marin County will open their studio doors and invite the public inside so what they do is not so mysterious. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 21 artists in the Point Reyes Open Studios will be sharing their art. On Dec. 4 and 5, more than 80 artists in Sausalito's Industrial Center Building will do the same.

It's a trip inside the artistic process. We wanted to chart some part of that trip. In the studio, you can ask questions. We didn't wait. We have asked four artists, two from each of the communities, to share a painting and their thoughts about that paintings.

Artist: **Tom Gehrig**

Painting: "Temporary Monument"

Studio: ICB #350

IJ: How did you name your painting?

Gehrig: I like humorous titles. "Temporary Monument" references something that is grandiose and spectacular, which this is not, in the

typical sense. That it is temporary makes me think that it would be removed at some point, if it were not from my imagination.

IJ: Where did the idea come from?

Gehrig: When I begin a piece I have no preconceived notion, no particular place. After a period of time, a "place" is unveiled to me. I treat it as a stage. A place where a sort of absurd theater takes place. I'm interested in doing work that challenges me on a variety of levels. It's fun not knowing what's around the corner.

IJ: What's personal about this painting?

Gehrig: My work is involved with symbolism and metaphor. For me, the ladder is a way for us to achieve a broader viewpoint. But in this case, what more will I see by climbing it? Likewise, the spotlight recalls illumination and knowledge. But where is the power source?

IJ: How much time did you spend on this painting?

Gehrig: Many months. It's a long process of addition and subtraction over a period of time. Things happen. Then later, they go away and something else enters from stage left.

IJ: Where did you paint it?

Gehrig: I work exclusively in my studio in the ICB in Sausalito. I record events with sketches, but mainly draw upon my inner self to load my paint with emotion.

IJ: How did you know when you were finished?

Gehrig: That's always the question. I will stare at it over a period of time and then arrive at a place to stop. The light was just right.

IJ: Does this painting trigger any memories for you?

Gehrig: Only as an homage to installation/performance artist Bas Jan Ader, who did a piece at U.C. Irvine back in 1972 that included a ladder and a light. (He unfortunately died performing a trans-Atlantic crossing as a work of art in a 14-foot boat. That piece was called "In Search of the Miraculous".) I loved his work very much.

IJ: How would you like people to spend time with this painting?

Gehrig: On the surface, my work is very reflective and peaceful. I attempt to draw you into my world by painting a romantic and beautiful place ... but then I like to zap you! I want you to see another layer. Hopefully, the longer one stays with it, the richer that layer becomes.

IJ: What kind of person do you imagine owning this painting?

Gehrig: A collector who appreciates irony, metaphor, paradox and a sort of absurd sense of humor.

IJ: What will you tell that person about this painting?

Gehrig: That they should not view it as a "particular place", even though it may reference one. That they should realize that my art asks questions, rather than provides answers.