

The ornament Joan Hilliard painted last Christmas will remain in the White House's permanent collection.

A Natural Artist

Joan Hilliard's Georgia Landscapes Are Warm, Soothing and Even Found in the White House

[WRITTEN BY KATHY WITT]

AS CHILDREN, OUR BEST ARTWORK GETS hung on the refrigerator, with mothers beaming their pride and claiming we have created masterpieces. But most of us don't grow to watch our best be good enough to decorate the walls of Emory University, Coca-Cola USA, Atlanta's Peachtree Plaza and the most famous house in the country: the White House.

For Roswell artist Joan Hilliard, finding her work hanging in the hallowed halls of the White House, as well as gracing galleries in Atlanta and private and corporate collections in Atlanta, New York and beyond, is a testament to her talent. If her talent is good enough for author Ferrol Sams, actress Shari Shattuck, U.S. Representative Tom Price and former Atlanta Braves pitcher Greg Maddux, her mother must be very proud.

Best Brush Forward

Trained at the Atlanta School of Art and Georgia State University, as well as Scottsdale School of Art in Arizona and the Fechin Institute at Donner Ranch in New Mexico, Hilliard's style has been described as Impressionistic, yet warm and soothing. Known for coastal and beach scenes imbued with a quiet beauty, Hilliard layers into her work an ethereal, almost storybook quality that resonates with this hushed sensibility.

She pushes herself for perfection, never rushing through a piece. "In my studio I have a sign saying, 'Is this the best I can do?'" Hilliard said. "I take my time with each painting. I look and look again, changing a few things."

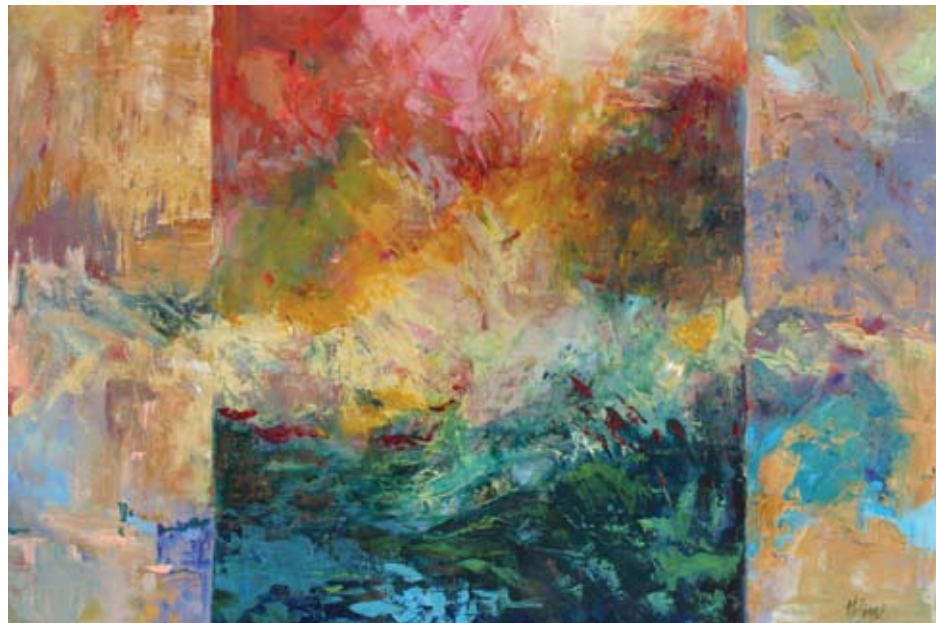
Hilliard was the first artist honored by The Bank of North Georgia in its Celebration of the Arts program, which kicked off in June 2007 in partnership with the Roswell

PHOTOGRAPHY
COURTESY OF
JOAN HILLIARD



Clockwise from left:
"North Georgia Rhapsody;"
"Reflections;"
"Coastal Memories"





“Gold Rush”

Convention & Visitors Bureau. She was one of three artists nominated in 2007 as the top Georgia visual artist by the National League of American Pen Women. She was also the winner of the first CABY Award, inaugurated in 2006 by the Roswell Cultural Arts Board to acknowledge excellence in Roswell’s arts scene, for Distinguished Visual Artist, and has had numerous gallery exhibitions throughout the Southeastern United States. The Roswell resident’s growing popularity has also led to two travels to Italy with the Georgia Festival of the Arts and the Atlanta Boys Choir as one of 17 visual artists.

An Artist’s Artist

In her earliest memories, Hilliard recalls gripping a paintbrush. She vividly remembers a painting demonstration that took place in church when she was a little girl. “I was very young and so very impressed and I thought, ‘I can do that,’” she recalled.

With paintbrush in hand and an endless source of inspiration from the North Georgia scenery before her, Hilliard gave in to her natural talent, painting with the same ease and enthusiasm that some children put into playing video games. “I could just always do it,” she said, modestly.

Throughout her life, Hilliard has supplemented her innate ability with arts education and what she calls “trial and error” and has been actively involved in the arts. In 1966, long before the concept of a festival celebrating the arts had become the go-to gig of forward-thinking community events planners, she helped create the Roswell Arts Festival, an event that is today recognized as one of the finest in Georgia. She is also a cheerleader for anyone endeavoring to express an artistic bent.

“She is an artist’s artist,” said Beth Kirk, a Roswell artist who nominated Hilliard for the CABY Award that she received two years ago. A longtime friend, Kirk said she admires Hilliard’s generosity in helping and encouraging other artists and in critiquing their work.

Added Don Howard, chairman of The Bank of North Georgia, “Her enthusiasm about her work always strikes me. She gives of herself and that speaks a lot about her.”

Howard recalls first encountering Hilliard’s work in the early 1980s through her eight-painting collection called the “Sesquicentennial Series.” “I still have that whole collection and really prize it,” he said. “Her artwork seems to capture the heart and soul of Roswell before most of us ever lived here; it’s Roswell in the early days when Canton Street was a dirt road, people traveled by horse and buggy and folks got all dressed up to go shopping. It was a simpler time and it’s fun to think about Roswell in those days,” he said. “When I think of Roswell, I think of Joan Hilliard. Not only does she capture it on canvas — she seems to represent every-

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DON HOWARD | Chairman of The Bank of North Georgia

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Indeed, career highlights include her selection, along with a small coterie of artists, to study overseas and recently netting an invitation to the White House by none other than First Lady Laura Bush.

The White House Comes a Callin’

Last fall, Hilliard was selected on behalf of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area to design and paint an ornament for the official 2007 White House Christmas tree. The theme, selected by the First Lady, was “Holiday in the National Parks.”



Hilliard poses by her hand-painted ornament in the Blue Room of the White House.

“We think that our national parks are more precious than gold to the United States,” Mrs. Bush said during her remarks at a media preview of the holiday decorations. Hilliard’s ornament, which depicts the beauty of the Chattahoochee River through seasonal scenes that incorporate the waterfalls and rocks, boaters and fly fishermen, was painted on an orb 8 inches in diameter.

“It was challenging,” she admitted of the composition, which was to capture in circular form the beauty as well as the recreational opportunities provided by this significant waterway. “I had to think in terms of top to bottom — not knowing where it would be placed on the tree — and make it flow.” Also required: Fitting the park’s name on the ornament. It was ultimately shortened to “Chattahoochee River NRA.”

The ornament was prominently displayed on the 18-foot Fraser fir tree in the White House’s Blue Room, where it joined the 346 other baubles hand-created by artists whose designs represent America’s national parks, memorials, seashores, historic sites and monuments.

Love of Nature

“I was honored,” Hilliard said, again with her characteristic modesty.

Besides challenging herself artistically, Hilliard found the ornament project to be personally rewarding because of her abiding love of the Chattahoochee River — a theme that has shown up more than once in her work. The artist’s series of large landscapes featuring the river and called the “Chattahoochee Collection” was the focal point of a recent exhibition at the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA) in Sandy Springs. These scenes were also on display at the Roswell Visitors Center for several months. Most of the paintings have since been bought by collectors.

This Thanksgiving, Hilliard’s work began an exhibit at The Cloister at Sea Island, Ga. For the upcoming Christmas holiday season, the Historic Roswell Convention & Visitors Bureau will also mount an exhibition of Hilliard’s work at the Visitors Center. This exhibition will include some of the artist’s Chattahoochee paintings and Georgia scenes, from the mountains to the shores. A special treat will be the inclusion of the replica of Hilliard’s White House ornament. (The original is now in the White House’s permanent ornament collection.)

“It’s part of its archives,” Hilliard reported. “How about that?!”

Besides the ornament, Hilliard recently created a holiday painting that represents Christmas in Roswell for the Convention & Visitors Bureau. The painting will be one of the bureau’s focus pieces for promoting its “Christmas In Roswell” event each year.

“Joan was selected to create this print based on her Historic Roswell Series,” said Dotty Etris, the bureau’s executive director. “She graciously agreed to create a Christmas scene that encourages observers to step back in time and remember the simplicity and beauty of the holiday season.”



“Chattahoochee Grasses”

In August of 2009, Hilliard will participate in a three-day “paint-out” at the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. This new arts event, the brainchild of Hilliard, will come to fruition, according to the artist, with the combined efforts of Etris and employees at the CRNRA office. Calling it “The Great Chattahoochee Paint-Out,” Hilliard’s intent is to showcase the beauty of the area. The Paint-Out will be open to all artists and plans include a juried section, as well as judging, awards, a show and a reception.

In the meantime, Hilliard’s work adorns the walls of several galleries and she continues her lifelong arts education. “We have such a beautiful area here that it’s hard for me to run out of inspiration,” she said. **PN**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Roswell Visitors Center at 617 Atlanta Street where, through the end of December, Hilliard’s paintings will be on exhibit, along with a replica of the ornament she created for the official 2007 White House tree. Contact Historic Roswell Convention & Visitors Bureau (800-776-7935, www.cvb.roswell.ga.us) for more information.

To see Joan Hilliard’s work, please visit www.joanhilliard.com.