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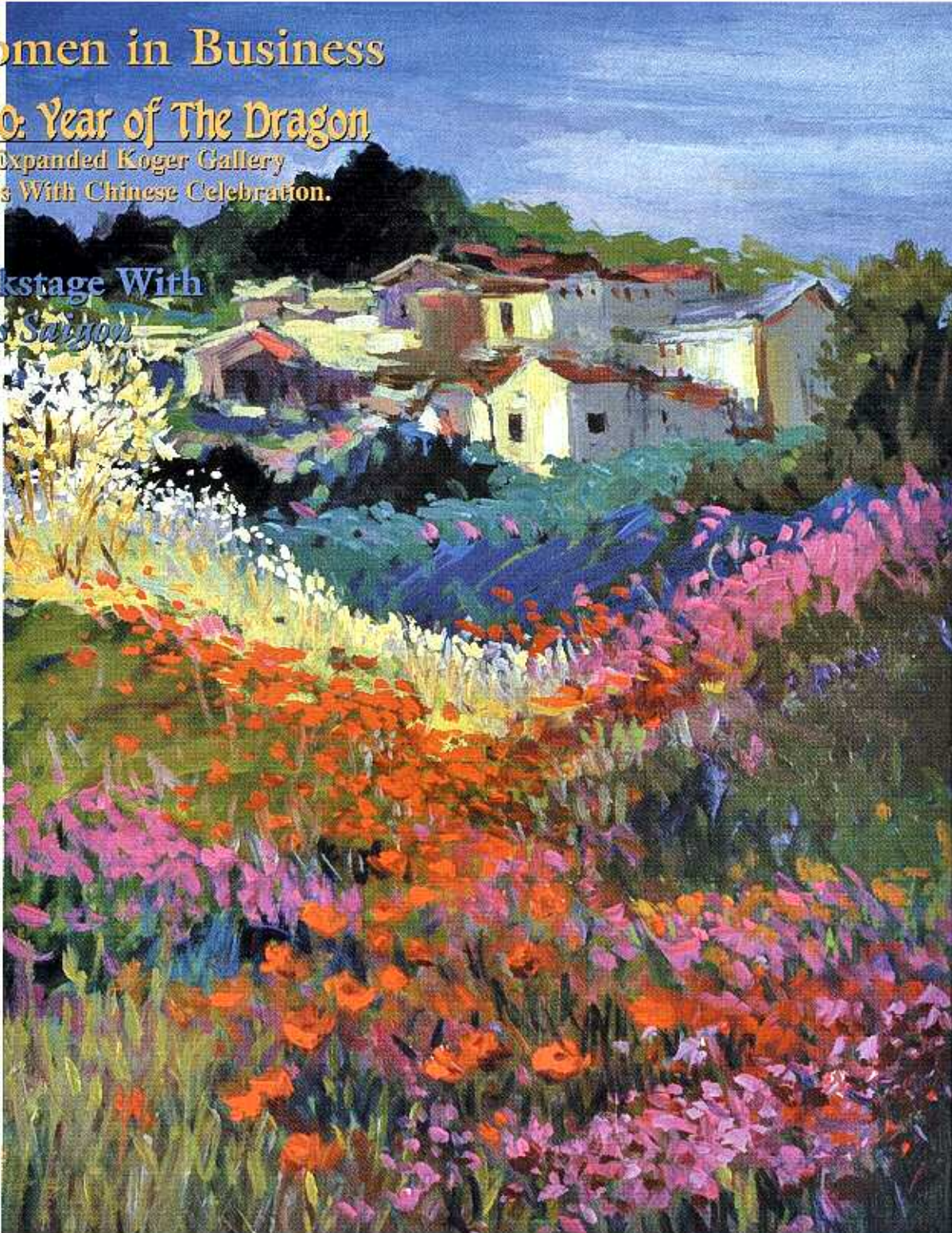
North Florida's Arts and Business Magazine

Women in Business

2000: Year of The Dragon

The Expanded Koger Gallery
Opens With Chinese Celebration.

Backstage With
Miss Saigon



Ellen Diamond

Wildflowers And Poppies

March/April 2000

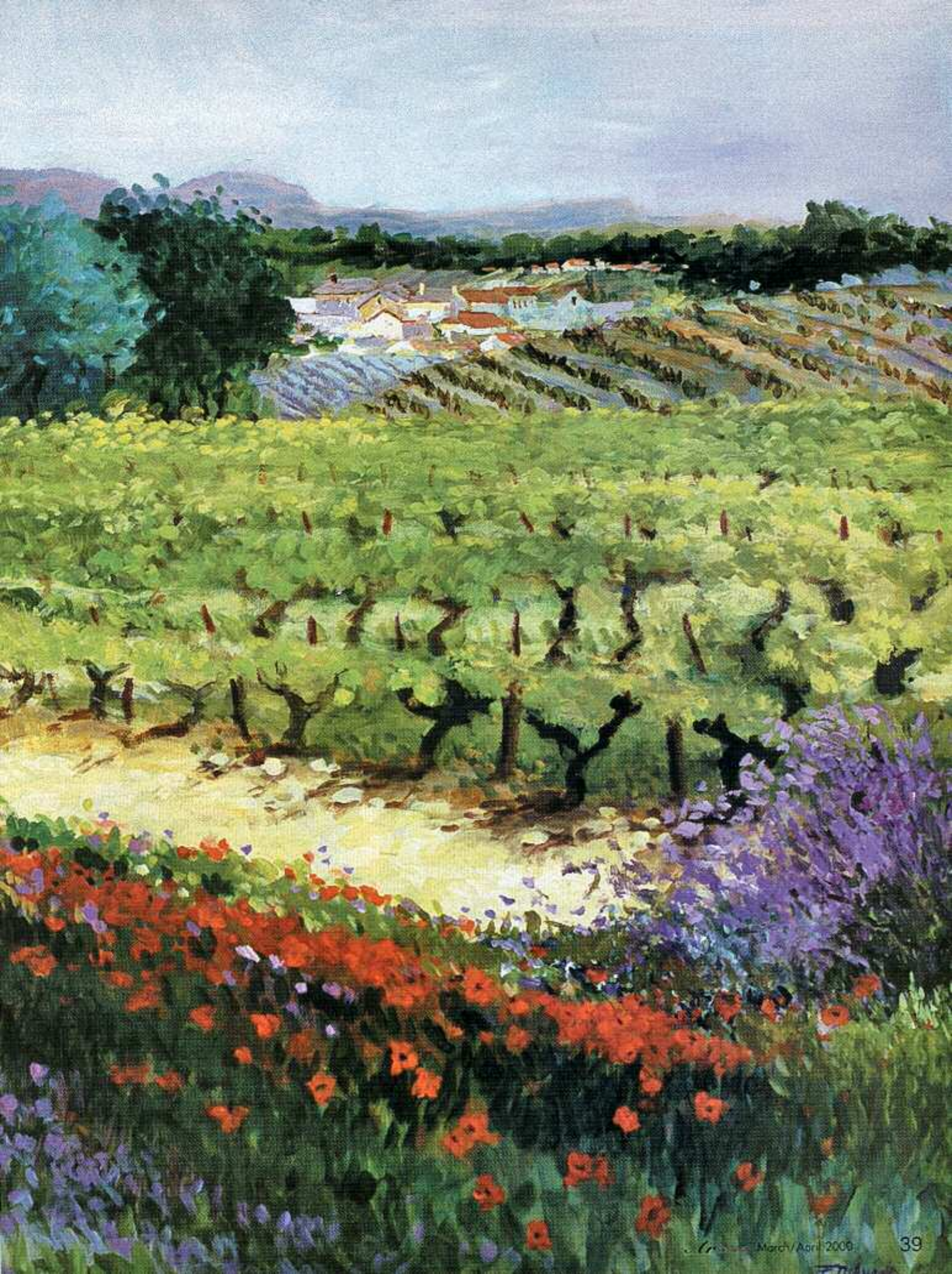
BRIDGING THE GAP: Landscapes by Ellen Diamond, Contemporary Impressionist

By Angela Tau Bailey

While rapid development in Northeast Florida has caused tremendous growing pains, we are simultaneously benefiting from an influx of sophisticated, culturally-minded transplants introducing their passion for the arts into our community. New Yorker Ellen Diamond is a shining example of a visual artist bringing great depth in artistic education and experience to our area.

Her luscious lavender-blue canvases depicting flower markets or flowering fields in Provence have graced the walls of Fairfax Gallery on Herschel for several years. Anyone who has experienced the French countryside firsthand will immediately see Diamond has captured the compelling Provencale "je ne sais quoi" quality of light and life, a landscape luring artists and tourists for centuries.







The Palm Valley Bridge



Village on The Hill

Fairfax owner Jack Slaughter first met Diamond “when she donated a painting for the annual BrAids benefit auction. I loved her use of brilliant color, her painterly brushstrokes, and of course, the French landscapes she chose to paint...and, soon after, invited her to show in my gallery. The results were unparalleled.”

“Ellen’s style, contemporary impressionism, was quickly embraced by scores of my clients, and today, she’s the featured artist at Fairfax Gallery. We’re also publishing and distributing giclee prints of her paintings throughout the U.S.”

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Diamond began her artistic studies as a young child at her father’s side. Ben Clements (1910-1998) was an academically-trained portrait painter whose classical sketches of celebrities were published in the 1930s by *The New York Times* and *The Herald-Tribune*. His multi-colored, late self-portrait dated 1990, approvingly overlooking his daughter’s Ponte Vedra studio, is reminiscent of a self-portrait by the Viennese expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka.

Diamond cites her father’s use of a palette knife in his commissioned society portraits as her first major technical influence. Today, she considers her “short, broken brushstrokes, with wads of color on my brush” as an “expressionist application of paint,” a quality marking the difference between her painting style and that of late nineteenth century French impressionists.

As a teenager, Diamond studied drawing at the Brooklyn Museum of Art School and Pratt Institute, then earned a degree in art from New York University during the heyday of the Greenwich Village beatnik era. Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Jackson Pollock, and Andy Warhol were big influences in her early paintings. “I experimented with realism, pop, cubism, semi-abstract, collage...,” Diamond remembers, “but I began as an abstract painter with a strong sense of design, and today draw on that knowledge of abstraction to develop compositions in my current work.”

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Bridge of Lions



The Red Umbrella

During the years she and husband Jay Diamond were raising three children, Ellen taught art in the New York City school system and at SUNY Nassau. Eventually, she opened her own art school on Long Island, with special emphasis on high school portfolio preparation for art school acceptance.

For many years, Ellen has also collaborated as a commercial photographer with Jay, a widely recognized author and professor in retailing and fashion merchandising, creating and compiling appropriate photo illustrations for his textbooks. In turn, Jay accompanies Ellen on her trips abroad to collect visual inspiration: "I shoot rolls and rolls of film, and fill sketchbooks, to provide the information I need. But it's back here in my studio, where I'm less distracted and more peaceful, that I accomplish the real work of creating paintings. Here is where I think better."

Relocating to the slower world of Ponte Vedra Beach in 1995 has had another unexpected influence on Ellen Diamond's work. "Our daughter encouraged us to move here, and we were intrigued with the Old World European look of St. Augustine," Diamond explains.

But her first trip over the Palm Valley Bridge changed her forever: "Something about being elevated, and the long perspective overlooking the banks of the Intracoastal reminded me of wetlands I had painted decades earlier when we spent summers in southern Maine."

Even more significant, "the contrast between Palm Valley with its old, unspoiled Florida landscape, and my New York roots, was so dramatic....Here was this old drawbridge, with all its charm and grace, being taken for granted by so many, becoming obsolete, scheduled for replacement. For so many years, I had been admiring bridges famously and fabulously painted by impressionists like Gustave Caillebotte and Monet. But suddenly, I was inspired to paint a bridge series myself, and for the first time I was equally inspired to paint subjects where I lived.

Now, local bridges in northern Florida have become my new passion."

Diamond's first paintings of the Palm Valley Bridge were soon followed by views of the old Ortega River Bridge, the Bridge of Lions in St. Augustine, and the small, elegant arc over the canal to Lake Marco, known to generations as "The Thrill Bridge." These newer bridge paintings and accompanying iris giclee prints in editions of 195 have proved extremely popular with Fairfax's clientele.

Mainly, Diamond appears fascinated with how water interacts with the bridge structures: "I photograph [them] from every conceivable angle at different times of day. I use the structure as a foundation for the interplay of color and light, which is what I'm really pursuing. If I had to reproduce a scene verbatim, without the emotional painterly qualities I try to achieve, it wouldn't be gratifying."

As with her imaginary views of gardens, markets, and vistas in Provence and Tuscany, Diamond scrutinizes her photographic records of Northeast Florida for certain patterns in the landscape or architecture, then designs composite compositions.

The artist continues, "I see a strong similarity between the light on the Intracoastal Waterway and the Mediterranean, or

on the St. Johns River and major European rivers, such as the Rhône. On our next trip to France, we're traveling on a river ship on the Rhône for a week and a half, so I can photograph French bridges. These lovely bridges have always offered me great vantage points for capturing the countryside, but now I'll be focusing on the French bridges themselves, in the same way I've been looking at our local, historic bridges here in Jacksonville."

Discovering a vital new passion to paint is rewarding in and of itself, but Diamond is experiencing other shifts in her paradigms since paying attention to the muse of the bridge.

"I rarely include people in a landscape, but after visiting with so many people in the Ortega neighborhood who describe such a love for the Ortega River bridge, I've decided to ask Jack Slaughter's parents to pose for me. I'll include a rendition of their figures on a bench, seen from behind, in hopes of capturing their contemplative mood, that peaceful feeling they gain by spending time near the Ortega river and bridge."

Fairfax Gallery will present an exhibition of her most recent paintings and her giclee print series March 24 through the reception, April 1, when the show will likely disperse to dozens of Jacksonville residents delighted to have a Diamond in their lives. The Gallery is working on developing a relationship with regional neighborhood preservation groups, to benefit their efforts through a 25% donation from the sale of Diamond's giclee prints of local bridges.

And in the near future, an entirely new audience will be appreciating Diamond's passion for bridges. The Pavilion Center for Women, operated by Baptist St. Vincent's and North Florida OB/GYN Women's Centers, Inc., has commissioned a large canvas depicting the Palm Valley Bridge as part of their launch of a bold, new concept in the delivery of women's healthcare. Carol Thompson, Executive Vice President, Systems Development at Baptist St. Vincent's, explains their view of Diamond's imagery: "This painting, *The Palm Valley Bridge*, is representative of what the Pavilion Center brings to area women—an opportunity to bridge together many modalities of women's healthcare—by offering the latest diagnostic, traditional and mind/body services in a single location. This reflects the philosophy at the Pavilion Center for Women."

Back in her studio, overlooking a seemingly vast expanse of palmetto in a dune preserve, her father is smiling.

Ellen Diamond, Contemporary Impressionist will be held March 24-April 1 at Fairfax Gallery, 4216 Herschel Street; for further information contact Jack Slaughter or Katrina Bryant at (904) 384-7724.

BrAids, an annual art auction held in February, benefits AIDs organizations in Northeast Florida.

