

SPRING BLOSSOMS



ARTIST PROFILE:  
**ELLEN DIAMOND'S**  
LIGHTNESS OF BEING

BY JANET HERRICK

If you stare at an Ellen Diamond painting long enough you see more than just the layers of her training, you see the layers of her train of thought. Composition is everything to her when creating a work of art. Her post-impressionistic brushwork and sensibilities, and her love of light and color give vibrancy to her work, but it's her composition that anchors it. In her latest collection of work, Courtyards and Gardens, Diamond paints more than a history of the physical, she creates spaces infused with a sense of possibility.



DELPHINIUMS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE



Ed Anderson





TWO FAR LEFT: SAN MIGUEL COURTYARD; THE IRIS PATH; GARDEN STEPS

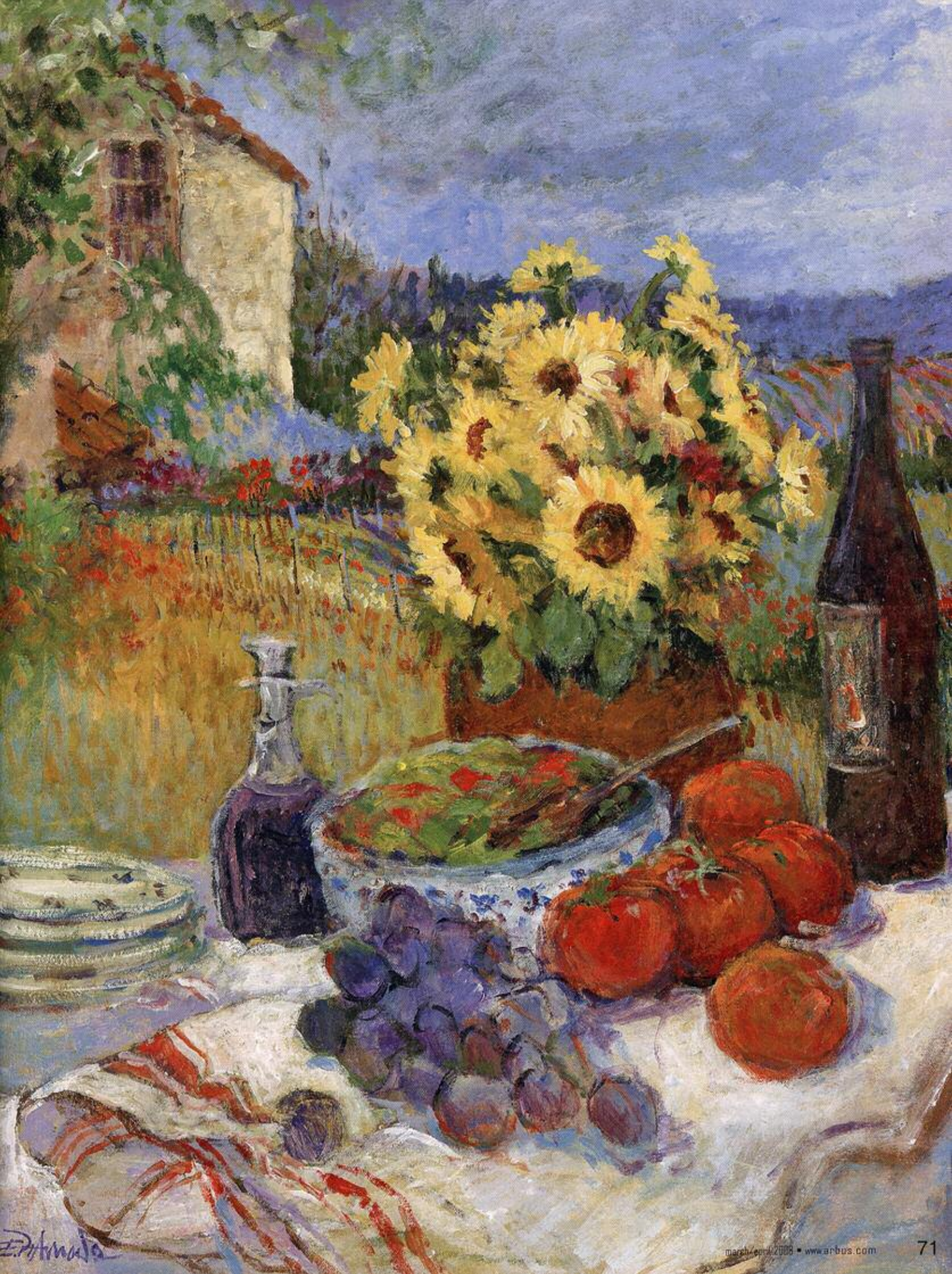
The main characters of Diamond's paintings are not people, but the components of place itself in the absence of people. In essence, space and place are both actor and stage. The mood of light, texture of architecture, characteristics of flora, and deep perspective of the pathway pulls the viewer in. To her, courtyards and gardens are the ultimate place of possibility. These are places with stories to tell, if one just listens closely enough. They are spaces where people meet to laugh and love, mourn and heal, reflect and grow. Diamond explains that, in Europe, courtyards and gardens were as essential to a home's layout as the kitchen or bedroom. "But in the U.S.," she says, "these types of spaces are harder to find unless you go to a city with a long European influence. Savannah and Charleston are examples of two such places."

Therefore, when she visits areas like these, both in Europe and the U.S., she becomes a shutterbug, shooting roll after roll of film to collect as much visual information as she can. When she returns to her studio, she goes through all her images,

again and again, looking for the one thing from each image that speaks to her. "Look at that wall," she says as she ruffles through an enormous shoebox of photos taken from one city alone. "Look at those roof tops. Ah! Look at those windows! Look at those geraniums! There is so much to choose from. I love putting all of these individual parts together to create a new space." Color is just as important as composition to Diamond, and is integral to her identity as an artist. "My passion is to take a simple subject and interpret it into something that is exciting in color. With...color as my favorite ingredient, I attack each canvas with gestural brushstrokes and a spontaneity that achieves a contemporary impressionist style."

Diamond's studio is walled with hundreds of art books that she regularly thumbs through for insight. "I've recently been studying Bonnard paintings that emphasize intense vertical lines on tall narrow canvases, not just in the painting, but the shape of the canvas itself. Again, I am not so much looking at how he painted his pieces, but how he crafted his compositions. I challenge myself when I take on such a perspective."





Edvard Munch



CHARLESTON COURTYARD







*BENCH AT THE SUMMER GARDENS*

## A FRIENDSHIP BLOOMS IN FAIRFAX

Diamond's unique vision of space and color was the seed of her early relationship with Jack Slaughter, owner of Fairfax Gallery in Avondale and Ponte Vedra. Says Slaughter, "About ten years ago, when Ellen first came to my gallery in Avondale to show me some of her work, I immediately knew that this was to become a lasting relationship. For many years, artists came to me to represent them; some were talented, others just didn't have it. Seeing Ellen's paintings was a different experience. Her magnificent canvases took my breath away, and have been doing so since our first meeting."

Diamond was thrilled to find that Slaughter really understood her processes, and the relationship between them took root and quickly grew, as did her fan base. "My clientele is, at once, in love with her paintings," explains Slaughter, "whether they capture the local landscapes, or the vistas of Provence and Tuscany, which she regularly visits each summer to paint in plein air. So many of the collectors of her work wait in anticipation for her to return from abroad to see what she has produced. They have learned that with each trip there will be bountiful canvases to please their senses. Her shoreline subjects of North Florida, sunflower fields and markets in Provence, seascapes on the Côte D'Azur, fields in Tuscany, and the St. Johns waterways have become favorites in my galleries and ultimately in private and corporate collections."

## BRINGING INSPIRATION HOME

Diamond has taken the cue from the power of courtyards that she has so admired and created her own delicious

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BENCH AT THE SUMMER GARDENS

PALM VALLEY GARDENS



private botanical space at her home in Ponte Vedra. An undulating stone path leads from the back patio to terraced bedding and potted flowers, and settles on the central focal point—a cascading waterfall. “I love the sound of the water,” says Diamond, as she closes her eyes and soaks in the sound. “It can soothe me the way nothing else can.” The view of her garden from her second story art studio, bordered by the marshes of Guana River State Park just beyond, is breathtaking. “Listen hard enough on a quiet day,” she says, “and you can hear the Atlantic Ocean breaking in the distance.” It’s the kind of space that begs to be painted. And like her paintings, the composition of her garden anchors the space where color and light play upon each other to entice the senses. “Yes,” she says, “I am so very happy not to have to travel far for inspiration. I treasure this space.”

The Zen quality of her home allows Diamond to immerse herself in her work, and she continues to build her collection of courtyard and garden images for her two-week show at the Fairfax Gallery in Avondale beginning April 4.

Says Slaughter, “Her latest effort of capturing the brilliance of courtyards and gardens, both here and abroad, promises to bring accolades from collectors and critics alike. Seeing a preview of some of the latest collection in her studio has reminded me of her uncanny ability to interpret what she has seen into breathtaking paintings.”

### GIVING ART FROM THE HEART.

The Courtyards and Gardens show has inspired Diamond in many ways and on many levels. “Painting has been my way of communicating with art lovers,” she says. “Inspired by an overwhelming response to my work,



I continue to be motivated by the wonderful reception of my pieces. Just give me a canvas, and a handful of paints and brushes, and I will spend each day bringing joy to my life."

But there is another element about the show that is driving Diamond: it is her love for her grandson, Michael Litt.

"Michael was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes at age thirteen, but he's got a great spirit, and he's also had tremendous support. Now he is a senior at Stanton College Prep High School, he's captain of the basketball team and he's a great academic student. In honor of him, I am donating a portion of the funds raised from the Courtyards and Gardens show to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Fund." Diamond is not new to this type of generosity: she is widely known and well respected for her support of many fine organizations to whom she has donated work. As both her artwork and deeds show, Ellen Diamond's strong inner core anchors her in joy, and allows her work to express her buoyant lightness of being.

*Courtyards and Gardens, April 4 to 18, 2008. Fairfax Gallery, 4216 Herschel Street, Jacksonville, 384-7724.*



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