

ARTIST PROFILE

P. Buckley Moss

By Niela M. Eliason

Probably the most famous resident of St. Petersburg's northeast neighborhood is the artist P. Buckley Moss. For 18 years, her gallery was on Beach Drive and 4th Ave., N.E. It is an elegant piece of architecture, tucked behind trees and partly hidden on the busy street. The building was formerly owned by Grover Austin, M.D., a plastic and reconstructive surgeon who had his offices there.

Two years ago, the collection of her paintings was moved to 1001 4th Street, North. The gallery is managed by Tim Finn, who has worked with Moss for twenty years. The gallery is a wonderful place to enjoy the tranquility and style of the P. Buckley Moss paintings.



P. Buckley Moss

night from 2 a.m. until 6 a.m. doing her painting! Then, back to bed for an hour's sleep and up again at 7 a.m. This doesn't stop her from joining her friends and family on bike rides around the Tampa Bay waterfront, however. You might see her around!

Moss faced some challenges as a child, including struggling with a learning disability and growing up with financial hardship during the Depression in the Richmond Borough of New York City. Moss was born with dyslexia, which made it very difficult for her to learn to read and write. Although her classmates taunted her, it didn't stop her from pursuing her special ability to draw beautifully.

Living through financially hard times impacted Ms. Moss' art career in an indirect but important way. "My father was a broker on the New York Stock Exchange, so we didn't have much money!" she said with a laugh. "We all congregated in the kitchen. We had a big stove that kept it warm. Some of the kids

Moss still owns the property on Beach Drive and lives there when she is in town. Her residence is in the front of the building, other parts being a studio for her work and also quarters for her children when they visit. Moss has six children and ten grandchildren.

I had the opportunity to meet Ms. Moss at the Finn Gallery just after the holidays, and she showed herself to be a charming and loquacious woman. Aging gracefully, she is humorous, energetic, and still working hard at what she loves. She said she had been up during the

would draw pictures and others would sit and read." She said she began drawing at about age 8 or 10. Artwork became her life and her world. But her parents' house was small. Her sister married and remained in her parents' home, and there was not enough room, so Moss went to live with her grandparents. Her grandfather subsequently became a prominent figure in her life.

"He was always there when I came home from school," she said. "My grandfather was an engineer on the railroad. He drove the locomotives. He was also a poet and an actor. He acted in a theater in Staten Island. Every Sunday after church was poetry time. He would go to his friend's house and they would sit and recite poetry and argue about words, what things meant and didn't mean, who was good and who wasn't."

She still thinks of how much is missed by not being able to read well. "I read, but slowly," she says. "It takes ages to get through a book."

"Sitting on the floor beside my grandfather's rocker, I could talk to him as a friend," she wrote in her autobiography, written with Malcolm Henderson. "He listened with patience to everything I had to say and he never spoke down to me. He made me truly believe that if I wanted to do something and tried my hardest, I would succeed."

An animal lover, she has always admired geese and horses, which play a prominent part in her charming artwork. She has



always seen the animals as symbolizing strength and stability.

"Geese mate for life," she told me, but she no longer rides horses. "I don't do anything dangerous anymore," she said with a laugh.

Her problems in school continued because of her learning disability; but, even then, her artwork was growing. Even though her classmates thought she was "not proficient in anything," her mother appreciated her talent and enrolled her in the Washington Irving High School for the Fine Arts. When college days came, she received a scholarship to Cooper Union, New York, an academy for pursuance of excellence in the arts and sciences. It was here that she knew her art was valid.

By the time she graduated, she had met Jack and was engaged to be married to him. After his army duty, they lived in Waynesboro in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, which became her home base. It was here that she first met the Amish and Mennonite people, whom she admired a great deal. They are frequently subjects of her paintings. Moss is a Roman Catholic but appreciates the generosity and sincerity of these people.

Throughout her time of motherhood with six children, she continued painting. Too busy to think about marketing, she would do things like make a painting for her children to take to a friend's birthday party. Then people began to come to her home and ask to buy her work, and that was the beginning. Her serene artwork became a great success.

"I am a strong-willed person," she says in her autobiography



with co-writer Malcolm Henderson, “with an obsession to paint.”

Today she works with many organizations on behalf of the learning impaired.

Moss has become a role model for the learning impaired and spends a great deal of time working with children. One of the main lessons she likes to impart to these children is the same message she received from her grandfather: that you can overcome your problem if you work hard and make an effort. She is a life-long member of the Girl Scouts, which she fosters. Donations of her work bring in millions of dollars for other children’s charities.

Her work is shown in galleries all over the country, including the P. Buckley Moss Museum in Waynesboro, Virginia. The museum attracts about 45,000 people a year.

“I think,” she says, “that my learning disability was an asset because I was able to concentrate on what I *could* do.”

Moss has received many awards, one of which is from the Archbishop of Florida, Fulton J. Sheen: The “Angel Award”, which is given to “a person in the media who makes outstanding contribution to the public to understand the God-given worth of a human person.”

To see her artwork and books and to get more information, visit the Finn Gallery at 1001 4th Street, North, St. Petersburg.

Read *An Autobiography of P. Buckley Moss, The People’s Artist*, written with Malcolm Henderson.

Check out her website: www.pbuckleymoss.com for more information and pictures of her artwork.