Get Rover and Fluffy Ready for their Closeups
April Zay is a local portrait painter

When April Zay is commissioned to paint a portrait of your pet, she wants it to look like your dog, not just some dog of the same breed.

A graphic artist by training with a bachelor’s degree in illustration from the Fashion Institute of Technology, Zay produced commercial art for years to pay the bills. About a year ago, she decided to go into business for herself.

At the helm of Hummingbird Arts, Zay makes freelance graphic designs, teaches art classes at Grounds for Sculpture and the Arts Council of Princeton, teaches private art lessons and art workshops for children, and paints commissioned portraits of pets.

“I wanted to get back into painting and I’ve always loved animals, so it seemed quite natural,” she said.

Zay, 29, is a Long Island native who has lived in Virginia, Oregon, Seattle, New Mexico and Long Island because her father was a scientist with the U.S. Department of Energy’s National Laboratories. Her husband, Brian, a chemist by profession, helps with bookkeeping and Web site management for her business. She has lived in Hamilton about three years.

In order to demonstrate her talent and skill, she painted a couple of portraits as samples. Her first subject was her grandmother’s dog, George, a red-gold hound with soulful eyes. Zay painted him posthumously from a photograph.

She also used a photograph to create a portrait of Roxy, an Akita, who is so friendly and well-behaved she accompanies Zay to dog shows, one of the places she goes in search of clients. She can use as many as ten or 15 photos to do a painting, observing each for information about the animal’s expression and attitude.

Other times, she will use separate pictures of two animals, but paint them as though they posed together. She has also used digital photo editing to combine two multi-animal portraits to be reproduced on unique notecards and wrapping paper for a family with seven dogs.

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Cell phone pictures won’t do, she said, because they don’t have the level of detail she needs to capture the spirit of the animal.

One of her clients, Phyllis Macpherson of Lawrence, said she was delighted to receive a portrait of her two cockapoo dogs, Maggie and Samantha. Her boyfriend had worked with Zay at a graphic arts firm. Maggie is white and Samantha is black.

“I opened it up and as soon as I looked at it, I broke into tears because she had caught the essence of both of them,” Macpherson said. “Although my dogs are sisters, she caught them perfectly, absolutely perfectly. It is an astounding talent, that she just sees things in these dogs, minute attributes of the dogs and she captures them in paint. It’s just amazing.”

Zay said she always looks carefully at the photographs she receives of the animals and asks if the client wishes the pet’s appearance to be enhanced, or if she should paint it, warts and all.

For example, Maggie’s face has an asymmetry that Macpherson considers part of her charm.

“It sounds strange to say but Maggie has one eye that is a little bit cockeyed, just the teeniest, tiniest bit. No one would ever notice it. April pointed it out in the photograph and then caught it in the painting. She caught everything about them. She even caught how their tongues stick out of their mouths differently when they pant,” she said.

In other cases, Zay has made the pets’ pictures a little prettier than they truly are. For example, one beloved dog looked a bit scraggly due to age and thinning hair. Zay painted him to look a few years younger and a bit fluffer. Other times, she has been instructed to leave out the under-eye stains some white dogs have.

One dog was photographed at the beach and his owners asked that Zay paint him with grains of sand stuck to his snout, as he appeared in the photograph.

Macpherson was so pleased with how well Zay captured her dogs that she immediately started thinking about having a portrait commissioned of her sister’s dog for a Christmas gift. She wondered how she would get a photo of Casey, also a cockapoo, without spoiling the surprise.

Eventually, she got her chance on the days of her sister’s garage sale.

“You’re going to be in and out of the house, why don’t you let me take care of Casey for the day?” she said.

Her sister was moved to tears when she opened the portrait on Christmas morning, having never realized the true motive behind her sister’s offer to dog-sit.

Macpherson said some people say she’s foolish to love her dogs so much. “They say there’s no comparison between having a dog in your life, or a cat in your life or a horse in your life and having a child in your life. Well, I don’t know. I don’t have children, but I know I reap a lot of satisfaction from having these two dogs in my life.”

Zay said her pet portraits have been fairly equally divided between dogs and cats. She said capturing a cat’s facial expression is a matter of painting the eyes accurately, as with dogs. For example, she showed two portraits of cats who live in the same home, but have entirely different faces.

One of them, has the deer-caught-in-the-headlights stare, it’s big lime-green eyes appearing almost completely round. The other one, the dominant member of the pair, had its eyes narrowed a bit, in a more aloof attitude.

Zay’s pet portraits start at $250 for an 8-by-10, unframed portrait of one animal with a simple background. She paints in oil on masonite.
An Interview with Colleen Attara at Triumph MicroBrewery, Princeton
by Cynthia Groya

The Triumph MicroBrewery in Princeton would hardly be considered the perfect gallery space for most artists: the lighting is dim and the soaring brick walls overwhelm the work of traditional two-dimensional artists. But there’s nothing traditional about Colleen Attara or her paintings and she’s not one to be daunted by unusual spaces or materials. In fact, they’re her mediums of choice... especially if she can find used materials and recycle them.

Colleen started painting six years ago after trading in a lucrative career in Philadelphia Advertising sales to be a full-time wife and mother. The inspiration for her particular style of art came from a piece she purchased after winning a particularly arduous advertising contract. I recently had lunch with Colleen at TM and we talked about her inspiration, her crazy schedule and caddying for her husband, Michael.

Cynthia Groya: “Can you conjure up that feeling that you had after you gathered all those business people together to buy an ad in New Hope after working so hard for it, then you saw the “doors” and decided “I am getting myself a reward”? What went through your head?

Colleen Attara: “I simply had to have that piece of art! I had gotten well over 30 businesses involved in a TV ad campaign and I felt as if I had easily knocked on at least 100 doors and at the end of a long day I walked into Zephyr Gallery and saw this really unusual painting called “Windows of Opportunity.” It was on an old window with 65 doors all going round in a circle and getting smaller and smaller. I was completely drawn to it. Those were all the doors I had knocked on! On the artist statement it listed where each piece was found….i.e.: a piece of Plexiglas on the streets of Philadelphia, doorknobs from garage sales…etc…. Even the wire that it hung from was found and re-used. The irony was that years later my work would hang in that gallery. I always remember that...

Colleen Attara’s art above the bar at Triumph.

photo by Stephen Millner

“can’t live without it”; that’s the feeling I want to always experience when I buy art and want people to have when they purchase my art.”

CG: “At what point did you give yourself permission to begin ‘creating art’?: When and how did you decide to start making your art and do you remember how those ‘doors’ influenced those first efforts? (And are they still inspiring you?)”

CA: “Yes, those doors still inspire me. That painting hangs in the area where I create at home. It is a reminder of what I can do if I simply get out of my way and all the doors that have yet to open before me.

“I basically gave myself permission to be vulnerable and put myself out there understanding that not everyone would appreciate my art. My sales background helped me tremendously as an artist. I was able to separate myself from my work and figure out how to market it. I was (and still am) always open to ideas or suggestions about how to do something. Clients continue to ask me to do things I have to figure out how to do, which makes me stretch and grow.”

CG: “You mentioned that in the art class where you were encouraged to ‘get messy’, you suddenly felt an ‘opening’ or ‘freedom’. Can you explain that?.... Were you suddenly inspired to create because you experienced an opportunity to go outside the boundaries as opposed to working within boundaries set by other artists/styles/traditions?”

CA: “I was always highly creative and that creativity always came out of me in some form. At that point, it was amazing how much fun I had simply “playing” with paint and materials. I started to trust the process. I realized it did not have to be perfect to be good. Most importantly,
I liked what I was doing and felt pleased with the end result. It was at that point that I realized there was something unique happening to me artistically. I went with my instincts. At times when I didn’t like something I created, I turned it into something else. That is when the real fun began by asking the questions, ‘What now? What can this become? What do I see?’ I realized in that class that I could create my own boundaries or have none at all.”

CG: “Your mother recently passed away after 3 years that were very hard for you. The introspection of those years is reflected in the art you created as you went from very light-hearted flowers in vases literally jumping out of windows to more somber, layered paintings of comforting interiors and sometimes distant and dark cityscapes punctuated by intimate but more hidden glimpses of personal lives. How did creating these artworks help you through this period?”

CA: “The past 3 years were really hard as my mom kept growing weaker, sicker, and more dependent on me, yet I didn’t have one solid medical diagnosis that I could point to to explain what was happening. Many smaller things were going on with her that cumulatively were debilitating. The first few years of this were sad and my painting gave me an outlet to escape into a world of bright colors and happy scenarios. By the final year, I stopped trying to change what was happening to my mom and accepted the fact that I could not control her fate. My mother was pretty much confined to her bed so that during her last year she lived vicariously through me. She wanted to know about each painting I did, creative ideas I was exploring, and upcoming shows and events. Other times that I went to see her we simply lay side by side and napped together. She thought I did too much and she loved to see me rest and be still. I think this is when my painting started to get deeper in both colors and in layers. Just like in the time I spent with my mom, I was both an observer and a participant. I think in my distant cities and intimate rooms I was sometimes looking out and sometimes looking in.”

CG: “You’re branching out in so many areas... Home furnishings, clothing design, corporate imagery... Along with your family life and part-time marketing position for Bucks Magazine. How do you do it all?”

CA: “I’m really gentle with myself. I work at my own speed, usually either manic or cruise. Many of the above projects came up because someone asked me to do it, so I said ‘yes’ and

The most important thing is my family. I lead this creative, crazy life so I can weave it around them as much as possible. They are my inspiration and support system. I want to be there for them and enjoy what we all have together. They understand that means I paint through the night sometimes and I understand that means putting my paintbrush down and turning the computer and cell phone off at other times.

Whenever I feel pressure, it is usually self imposed, so I slow myself down and try instead to feel grateful that I have projects to finish. If life goes the way we all want it to, there will always be things we are working on, so I am comfortable with not having everything “done.” I write “perfectly imperfect” on all of my art, because aiming at imperfection done perfectly allows me to create with more freedom. Deadlines at the magazine are challenging, but I just dig in deep for a week or so and get it done.”

Colleen Attara’s mixed-media artwork was on display at Triumph Micro Brewery in Princeton through July 20th. There were 32 pieces, 7 of which were acrylic on canvas.
**Member Achievements**

**Sandy Askey-Adams** had a painting titled “Afternoon Calm” juried and accepted into the National “Paint the Parks” Art Show and Competition. This show is one of the largest and most prestigious art show competitions in the United States. The painting will also be going on a National Tour with the other 99 winning paintings. Also selected for the Second Top 100 in the show were her paintings titled “Summer in the Allegheny Forest” and “Allegheny Forest Land.” For the Second Mini-50, two others were accepted: “River View Silence” and “Canal and Towpath.”

**Stephen Millner** had a mixed media painting accepted into the Mixed Media Gallery juried exhibit “250 ART” which ran from June 6th through June 24th. Steve’s “La Luna” is composed of paper, paint, printed material, and photography. The bather in the artwork is from a photograph taken at Belmar, New Jersey.

**Derek Jecxz** has a photograph “Ego” in a juried exhibit titled “Reflections” at the Susquehanna Art Museum in Harrisburg, running from July 31st through September 7th. Also, his photograph “Before Ice,” taken in Yellowknife (Northwest Territories, Canada) will be in the Gallery 125 juried Fall Show opening Friday, September 12 and running through November 8, 2008.
Member Achievements

John Ennis recently completed this portrait of John Bryson, chairman, CEO and President of Southern California Edison. John received this commission after reading about John Bryson’s retirement and sending a letter of solicitation. Bryson began his career as an environmentalist. After receiving his law degree from Yale University, he and six other staff members of the Yale Law Journal founded the Natural Resources Defense Council, a group dedicated to fighting for environmental issues through the courts. He eventually became president of the California Public Utilities Commission, where he sued Southern California Edison for six million dollars. Ironically, he eventually was hired by Edison to develop a “green” culture within the company, and recently retired as one of their most successful and appreciated presidents. John said that “as a portrait artist, it’s hard not to get caught up in the excitement of playing even a small part in the history of such a stellar career.” John enjoyed the time spent with Mr. Bryson and hopes that his admiration for the man is conveyed in this portrait.

Twofor Marie Kane’s poems were chosen for publication by prestigious journals. Delaware Valley Poets, a non-profit organization with more than seventy members that holds workshops and readings in the Princeton area, chose “To Die Just That Much.” The poem will be included in the 2008 anthology published by Belle Mead Press. The second poem, “Blindfolded at Yoga” was chosen for an Honorable Mention award in the Philadelphia Inglis House International Poets with Disabilities Contest. It was one of twelve winning poems and will be published in the Inglis House Chapbook in 2009. The poem can be accessed at www.wordgathering.com; click on the 2008 Poetry Contest Winners link.

Member Presentations - May 7, 2008

Patricia Gambino

Patricia Gambino is a pottery maker who enjoys fashioning both functional and non-functional pieces. Her firing technique is unusual; she uses barrel firing in a stainless steel container that can reach 1,300°.

Her procedure is to throw the pot or decorative piece she designs, fire it, burnish the pot to smooth out the surface, and then use crushed multivitamins, minerals, such as copper, or salt to give the piece color. Her final step is to wrap the piece in weeds or algae with the minerals, place it in the steel barrel, lay a wood fire on top of it, and allow it to burn for a day. This lengthy and uncontrolled process in a reduction environment causes the lack of oxygen to react with the elements included with the pot, creating unusual colors. Patricia comments that “no two pieces are alike” because of her painstaking efforts with her art. Looking at the artistic results she brought with her, AOY members and visitors were in total agreement regarding the remarkable nature of her creativity.
Member Presentations - May 7, 2008
by Marie Kane, photos by Stephen Millner

Lynette Shavel

Lynette is a photographer who prefers natural light for her outstanding photographs. Many of her subjects are people who hire her for weddings and the like; portraiture is a clear talent of this artist. Her photographs on large canvases are mostly black and white or sepia-toned. She uses fiber print with Photo Shop, but does color her own work. She switched to digital two years ago and prefers giclée printing on watercolor paper for her prints; she also applies patterns and textures to the canvas before printing the image. She works with a printmaker in England, and sends all her pictures out to be developed. Lynette’s formal portraits and candid views bring out the personalities of all of her subjects in a way that few photographers achieve.

July 2, 2008

Lou Caccamo

Like many of our members, Lou Caccamo has been a lover of art since he was quite young. In high school, he was voted the Class Artist, and designed a woodblock linen print that he gave to the school. His adult career focused mainly on technology, but in the seventies, he gladly took painting classes and other college art courses. When he retired, he devoted himself to learning about painting through art courses at Bucks County Community College and of course, performing the craft himself. His oil paintings of a corncrib at the Thompson Neely Farm and landscapes at Peace Valley Park demonstrate this devotion to his craft. After joining AOY, Lou became involved in the Plein Air group; one of their outings occurred at the Lambertville Station. Lou’s painting was accepted into the juried show that the Station sponsored. Lou also paints from photographs, and copies the masters such as Cezanne. His work was clearly enjoyed by the members who appreciated his clarity of vision in his vivid local scenes.

Joanne Seglem

A new member of AOY, Joanne Seglem, is the director of Gallery 125 in Trenton, NJ and a very accomplished artist. She is an acrylic painter, a mixed media artist, and a photographer. One of the interesting facets of Joanne’s art technique is that she uses her hands, and not brushes, to paint. Her oil pastel, “Flowers” reflects this innovative approach in its bold strokes. For mixed media, Joanne uses cut paper and pastel and believes that ‘small’ is better for this genre because the changes in prospective are more effective. Her photography covers such subjects as the Bethlehem Steel Mill and sculptures in the park in Trenton. She often uses cyanotype as an alternate form of photography. In this process, the photographer uses sensitized paper and places an object on it in the sun; the object leaves a shadow of its shape on the sensitized paper, which is then developed and becomes a print. The photographer can color the image if so desired. Joanne conveyed her boundless enthusiasm for art in the terrific images she displayed.
The second annual Yardley Borough Jazz and Arts Fest was held on Saturday, June 21 at Buttonwood Park. The Yardley Business Association sponsored the event and various musicians provided pleasurable music throughout the day. Fifteen Artist of Yardley members participated in the daylong festival. Patricia Gambino chaired the hardworking committee and was largely responsible for the smooth running of the event. The main tent, which was set up the night before, was twenty by thirty feet and accommodated all the artists’ work. Artists staffed the tent throughout the day. Maggie Robinson created the eye-catching poster and post cards for the event. Besides the art in the big tent for sale, there were three children’s programs managed by Cheryl Copeland that drew twenty-five participants. April Zay presented an origami workshop, Cynthia Groya offered an ‘Action Jackson’ drip painting session, and Colleen Attara held a mixed media self portrait session. All the young participants enjoyed their hour with art! Other committee members who played a large role in planning and implementation were Lou Caccamo, Len Franckowiak, and Jenny Schaeffer. Thanks to all of our members who volunteered their time for this event.

Patricia Gambino, chairperson of the AOY Arts & Jazz Fest Committee.

April Zay leading an origami workshop at the Fest.

The AOY tent at the Arts & Jazz Fest.

AOY Considering Partnership with Yardley Borough in Blacksmith Barn

This project is in the preliminary stages. The AOY Executive Board has visited the stone barn (located behind Fire House Cyclery and adjacent to the Buttonwood Park Tot Lot) and discussed some of the general concepts with the Mayor and Borough Manager. AOY Interim VP Michael McAllister and John Ennis are co-Chairing this Committee. While there appear to be some exciting possibilities, it is not likely that the building will be habitable for a year or two. AOY will be applying for federal tax exemption in preparation for this and other opportunities.

AOY VP Mike McAllister with Yardley Mayor Matt Sinberg at the blacksmith barn.

Photo by Stephen Millner.
While perusing Christie's catalog of their April 10 auction of photographs by Diane Arbus (1923-1971) I was reminded of the intensity of the interaction she created between herself and her subjects. She said:

“IT always seemed to me that photography tends to deal with facts whereas film tends to deal with fiction. The best example I know is when you go to the movies and you see two people in bed, you’re willing to put aside the fact that you know perfectly well that there was a director and a cameraman and assorted lighting people all in that same room and the two people in bed weren’t really alone. But when you look at a photograph, you can never put that aside...

“I do feel I have some slight corner on something about the quality of things. I mean it’s very subtle and a little embarrassing to me, but I really believe there are things which nobody would see unless I photographed them.

“For me the subject of a picture is always more important than the picture. And more complicated. I do have a feeling for the print but I don’t have a holy feeling for it. I really think that what it is, is what it’s about. It has to be of something. And what it’s of is always more remarkable than what it is.” Diane Arbus, Aperture, 1972, pp 5-16.

This last statement reminds me of an anecdote I once read about Pablo Picasso: Picasso was travelling by train, and a man in his compartment recognized him. The man struck up a conversation, and complained that Picasso’s paintings of people didn’t look like real people. In support of his argument, the man took from his pocket a photograph of his wife, and, displaying it to the painter, said “This is my wife.” Picasso examined the photograph, and responded to the man, “She’s awfully small, and flat.”

One comes to a realization that a simple black-and-white photograph, often regarded as a pure form of recording the “true appearance” of a subject, is a monumental visual manipulation. Not only has all the color been drained from it, but all of its depth and texture. The flat, glossy image is no more an accurate representation of a person than a cubist representation., or, as Arbus puts it, “what it’s of is always more remarkable than what it is.”

Two Girls in Curlers, NYC 1963 by Diane Arbus