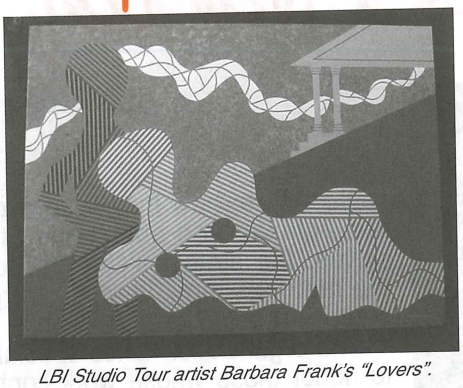
Long Beach Island Artists Open Studios to the Public

by Victoria Ford



LBI Studio Tour artist Barbara Frank's "Lovers".

When 16 fulltime, professional Long Beach Island-based artists fling wide the doors of their studios on June 23 and 24, the public will get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the creative process and the workspaces in which masterpieces are born.

The free, self-guided tour runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. both days, with studios both private and public participating in a way that is meant to be "very interactive," in line with the tour's mission, as devised by glass artist and tour organizer Mary Tantillo. During the tour, each artist is encouraged to conduct demonstrations of his or her specialty in whatever way possible, she said, even by storyboarding, if necessary.

With meticulous attention to detail, Tantillo has created a brochure, complete with each participating artist's name and street address along with a description of his or her work and an illustrated map of the studio locations on the route, which may be followed as precisely or as loosely as a tour-goer likes.

All the necessary materials are available to download and print from the event's website, www.lbiartists.com, and to pick up at many local businesses, at each of the artists' studios, and at the Long Beach Island Foundation of the Arts and Sciences, which will be hosting a show of original works that weekend called "Tabletops: A Ceramics Invitational Exhibition" and offering tours of its clay studio.

Other media represented throughout the tour include oil and acrylic paint, watercolor, mixed media, collage, glass, photography, pottery and sculpture, woodcarving and woodturning, printmaking and jewelry making.

The inspiration for the Open Studios tour grew out of Tantillo's experience of living for three years in Santa Cruz, Calif., where such tours are common and very popular. While there, she observed the impact effective promotion of the arts can have on a community, which in turn makes life, in her opinion, "more interesting and fun."

"I really wanted to bring that to LBI," she said, in an effort to help establish the Island as "a cultural beach town epicenter" and to strengthen the artist community that has always existed, if somewhat disjointedly. "There's a lot of artists here, ... we just don't all connect," she commented.

The life of an artist, after all, is such that "you have to be your own best friend, your own publicist; it's helpful to have a good artist community," she said. Making and taking opportunities for artists to network, cooperate and support each other, all while engaging the public, are important to steps toward fulfilling that objective.

Her hunch – that, given the right circumstances, the Island could and would embrace such opportunities – appears to have been right on the money, as suggested by the overwhelming turnout for the first LBI tour, just last year.

According to the sign-in sheets, 250 people took advantage of the opportunity to explore 15 artists' studios last year, which was a delightful surprise, considering we just put bright green signs along the roads" to mark the route, she said.

Improved signage was one change Tantillo intended to make in her marketing strategy for the second annual

to be continued on page 26

Open Studios tour, she said. Moving the tour dates back a week, closer to July 4 while not conflicting with any other major cultural events in the area, should also give attendance a bit of a boost, she added.

Most of the artists who took part last year decided to do it again, and hopefully everyone who attended will want to repeat the experience, too (and will have talked it up over the past year to all their friends, who will be eager to joint them this time around).

For her part, Tantillo's home studio is in North Beach, where her love for the natural environment and surroundings inform her glasswork, which has found its way into homes, businesses and private collections around the world. She concentrates in stained glass and fused glass jewelry and accessories, including a line of pendants of her own design called Beach Baby Beads. Her work is characterized by her belief that art and science are closely linked and by her use of light, color, texture and meaningful imagery to evoke interest and motion.

She also teaches "hot glass bead making" and "stepping stone mosaic" courses at the Foundation and at adult schools in Ocean County and elsewhere throughout New Jersey. Examples of Tantillo's work can be found at her professional website, www.swellcolors.com.