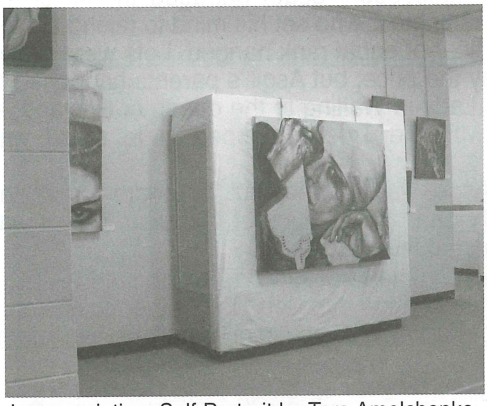
Artist's Corner

For the Amelchenko's, Art is a Family Affair



Large painting: Self Portrait by Tara Amelchenko, titled "La Notte Bianca."

I know there is strength in the differences between us, And I know there is comfort where we overlap.
— Ani Difranco, "Overlap"

The bond between mother and child is one of the strongest a human heart can know – and, perhaps, fortunate few understand that as well as Alison Amelchenko and her daughter Tara, the two women whose joint art exhibit, "DNA: Two Generations, Two Views" hung in the gallery on the second floor of the Ocean County College Fine Arts Center earlier this year. As an introductory stroll around the gallery at once revealed, the beauty of their relationship lies not only in what they have in common but also what makes them unique – the artistic styles that distinguish the work of one Amelchenko from that of the other suggest the women's inspiration is drawn from two very different sources.

In addition to heredity, the two share a remarkable gift and intense lifelong passion for fine art, in which both women are totally immersed both personally and professionally. Both hold a bachelor of fine arts degree from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY (also the alma mater of Tara's grandfather and father) and even studied under the same Professor Faust, one 30 years before the other. And, while their educations, careers and lives seem to have been similarly driven by the themes of purpose and dynamism, each woman retains a clearly defined sense of self.

Their relationship is marked by an abundance of mutual respect and admiration, which makes them steadfast friends, comfortable colleagues and well-suited business partners. They share a joint venture in Amelchenko Studios in Bay Head.

Alison is originally from Summit and started her teaching career at the du Cret School of Art in Plainfield, but she raised her two kids – Tara, 28, and Paul, 30 – at the Jersey Shore. In 1989 she starting teaching at the then-brand-new Kid's Art Studio in Sea Girt, which was founded on the belief that creativity, inherent in all children, is best accessed and nurtured via insightful, imaginative exploration and experimentation; and that confidence and self esteem are best cultivated in an open, intimate and encouraging learning environment. She moved to Bay Head a few years later and took over ownership of Kid's Art Studio about four years ago.

About two years ago, Tara moved to Manhattan, NY, where she lives an artist's dream, balancing her own business of commissioned portraits, decorative finishing and residential and commercial murals (she created Signature Murals, LLC in 2000 and recently finished a large-scale exterior building mural in New York City) with her work as an associate at the Stellan Holm Gallery, which often calls for hobnobbing with celebrities and traveling abroad to assist in artist receptions and gallery openings.

International travel is nothing new to Tara, who studied in Venice, Florence, Siena, Assisi and Rome and has since worked and collaborated on projects in Italy, Germany and Norway, according to her mom.

Such adventures have both shaped her and greatly influenced her artwork, mixed-media pieces that are masterful, evocative and bold. Her equine series is enchanting in its realism and its spot-on depiction of a horse's dark and powerful gaze.

Alison's sharp, clean style, characterized by close attention to line work and to the way light plays and sweeps across surfaces, employs lighter themes and a softer palette. In her oil paintings that were part of the DNA exhibit, she infuses seashells with color, jellyfish with funk and bright blooms with personality.

Alison commends Tara's assertiveness and courage, as evidenced in the way she channels a certain melancholia in her artwork; she uses it as a kind of creative catalyst, her mom explained, and the result somehow reflects an ironic blend of her outwardly dramatic side and her inner gentleness. In fact, she said, she believes Tara's style has informed her own, inspiring her to incorporate darker colors and bolder expression.

That reciprocity is perhaps at the heart of their DNA show.

For both women, life is a continuous learning process, a winding road they walk together, seizing lessons and opportunities to grow, both individually and together, at every turn.