

Painter creates arresting art

BY **ALEX BIESE** • COASTAL MONMOUTH BUREAU • FEBRUARY 28, 2008

WALL — After one look at the soft and loosely painted watercolor seascapes and Shore scenes adorning the walls of the township home of artist Lisa Grob, most people would never guess that Grob's past involves New York crime families, multimillion dollar heists and undercover operations.

But it does. That's because before she settled down to paint full time, Grob worked for 25 years for the FBI.

Vicky Culver, director of the Guild of Creative Art in Shrewsbury, said that, based on Grob's work, "you'd never imagine she was an FBI officer."

Said Culver, "I love her limited use of palette, the light quality of her work, the atmospheric feel she gets to all of her work. It is very, very calming and beautiful."

Grob, who grew up in Woodbridge, said she was given her first paint-by-numbers kit from her parents at age 5, and by high school she had gone through more than 50 of the kits.

While a high school student, Grob, who is now in her 50s, said she was given a set of oil paints one Christmas, and based on the strength of her portfolio, she was offered a partial scholarship to the Pratt Institute in New York.

"My father said, 'You can't eat canvas.' He was a realist. I, on the other hand, was not," she said.

Instead of attending art school, Grob graduated from St. Francis University as a biology major and then spent three years teaching high school biology.

"After three years, I had memorized the lesson plan," she said.

In late 1972 Grob, who was in her 20s at the time, met an FBI agent who was married to a fellow teacher. The bureau's academy in Quantico, Va., had recently graduated its first batch of female recruits and the agent persuaded Grob to join up.

"He guaranteed me I would not be a secretary," Grob said.

Grob began 15 weeks of training on Sept. 24, 1973, with a daily schedule that included physical training and firearms instruction and lectures in law and procedures.

"It was excellent instruction, but they kept the pressure on all the time," she said.

In January 1974, Grob was stationed at the bureau's Dallas office, where she was assigned to white collar crimes, such as bank fraud and embezzlement cases.

Throughout all of her travels, Grob said, she always took her art with her.



Lisa Grob of Wall, a former FBI agent, is now a painter whose work will be exhibited at the Monmouth Festival of the Arts. (STAFF PHOTOS: BRYAN FERREIRA)



The many paintings of Lisa Grob. The name of this Painting is called "Asbury Park". Photos of Paintings Courtesy of Lisa Grob

"It was a nice decompression," she said.

Grob was transferred to New York City in August 1974, where she worked in both foreign counterintelligence and investigating organized crime. Among her assignments was an undercover operation involving garbage companies that led to the conviction of Joseph Gambino, the nephew of crime boss Carlo Gambino.

As a part of that investigation, the bureau started its own garbage collection company. The operation was the first time, Grob said, that the FBI deposited money into a bank, the first time bureau agents joined a trade union and the first time an undercover company was registered with the Department of State.

"When we started making money, they went crazy, because they didn't know what to do with the money they were making," she said.

Grob was then transferred to the bureau's Brooklyn-Queens offices, where she was a part of the team investigating the 1978 Lufthansa heist, where members of the mob made off with \$7 million from Kennedy Airport.

Grob then spent four years in Washington, working with the House Appropriations Committee Surveys and Investigative Staff. She moved to the bureau's Washington offices in 1986, working in foreign counterintelligence.

In 1994, she became a field supervisor in Newark, and three years later she was named assistant special agent in charge of the division's violent crime, terrorist and foreign counterintelligence programs.

Grob retired from the FBI in 1998, dedicating her time to painting. While she had spent the bulk of her life creating oil paintings, by this time she said she had switched to watercolors.

"It's an extremely spontaneous medium," Grob said, describing watercolors as loose and flexible.

With paintings of Shore locales such as Spring Lake and Ocean Grove in her portfolio, Grob, who moved to Wall in 2004, said, "I have to be around the water. . . . To me, it's relaxing. I can paint seascapes all day long."

Grob, who is a member of the Guild of Creative Art and is a signature member of the New Jersey Water Color Society, said that during her time in the FBI people, birds and animals were for the most part nowhere to be found in her paintings.

"Now, they're starting to come back in, on the boardwalk or somewhere at a distance."

When asked if Grob's art reflects her career with the FBI, Culver said, "I think it complements it as a contrast, from what she must have dealt with in her professional life. It must have been quite difficult and dark, but her work is quite sensitive and spiritual, I find."

Viewers of Grob's work, Culver said, can find "a sense of peace."

Describing her work, Grob said, "I'm creating my own world, my own little place, and I'm inviting the audience to join me."

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WHAT'S NEXT

Lisa Grob's art will be among the work at the Monmouth Festival of the Arts to be held at Monmouth Reform Temple, 332 Hance Ave., in Tinton Falls in April.

PHOTO GALLERIES



The many paintings of Lisa Grob. The name of this Painting is called "Monmouth Light" Photos of Paintings Courtesy of Lisa Grob

[LOCAL ARTIST: Lisa Grob](#)