

under the sun

Local Artist Lives Close To Nature

BY DAWN ELLEN BOYD

In Henry David Thoreau's American classic, "Walden," he admonished his readers to "Simplify, simplify, simplify."

A Brunswick County artist has taken that advice to heart.

Ken Buckner left behind a career in advertising and commercial art to settle in the South Brunswick Islands seven years ago to be close to nature and paint.

"It is wonderful for a painter here," he said. "Everywhere I looked there was a painting."

Buckner gained local fame early this month when he won the best-in-show award in the Brunswick County Juried Art show.

Winning was a complete surprise. A friend had borrowed his watercolor, "Onions," and entered it in the competition.

It was the first time one of his paintings had been shown in Brunswick County.

Buckner is building his own house and studio. He laughed, "Every time I sell something I buy some more lumber."

An avid naturalist, he is cutting a series of nature trails through his property and has planted a garden behind his house.

Animals are all around Buckner's studio. Deer sometimes graze nearby, and he even tosses food to a friendly fox. Wood ducks swim on the pond, and a varied collection of lizards use his deck for sunning.

He said, "It's been like a rebirth to be so close to nature."

He first became interested in art while growing up in Detroit. After deciding he would like to design cars, he enrolled in college to study mechanical engineering.

Two years later he transferred to the University of Michigan where he majored in advertising and art history.

Despite his college background in art, he didn't feel he had been taught enough of the basics to be as competent an artist as he wanted to be.

Art Center School in Los Angeles, at that time considered one of the top two art schools in the United States, was his next stop. While there he completed four more years of undergraduate work.

After graduating he spent six months at the British Museum in London studying the drawings of the old masters.

"Many of the drawings had never even been published," Buckner said. "You could just show your student card and they would set up the drawings for you to study... even original Michelangelos and

Rembrandts."

Buckner spent the next five years in advertising, working for such well-known accounts as Cole of California and Bill Blass.

The Bill Blass logo, now seen on the labels of expensive clothing all over the world, was one of his designs.

He laughed, "Finally I said to myself there's got to be more to life than selling bathing suits." He spent the next two years working in all phases of film making.

One memorable incident from his days in motion pictures involved his first acting job.

The company he worked for was making a film on race cars for an auto parts company.

Buckner said, "They pulled a little trick on me. I was supposed to rush into a tent and say my line, which I did. I didn't know it, but the first time you act it's a tradition to play this little joke where I was expecting the other person to say his line and he didn't say it. The cameras were rolling; they were filming, knowing I was very frustrated. It's a terrible feeling!"

His next job was illustrating educational and children's books. It was at this time he met Miller Pope, who invited him to visit Ocean Isle Beach.

"I loved the natural diversity and the fishermen and people changing. I felt I wanted to capture some of that," said Buckner.

Around the time of his first trip to Brunswick County, he was commissioned by the headquarters of a multinational corporation in Trumbull, Conn., to do a series of oil paintings representing several northeastern states.

That was his springboard out of commercial art and into the fine arts. He decided to support himself by his art, so after completing his project he began painting portraits.

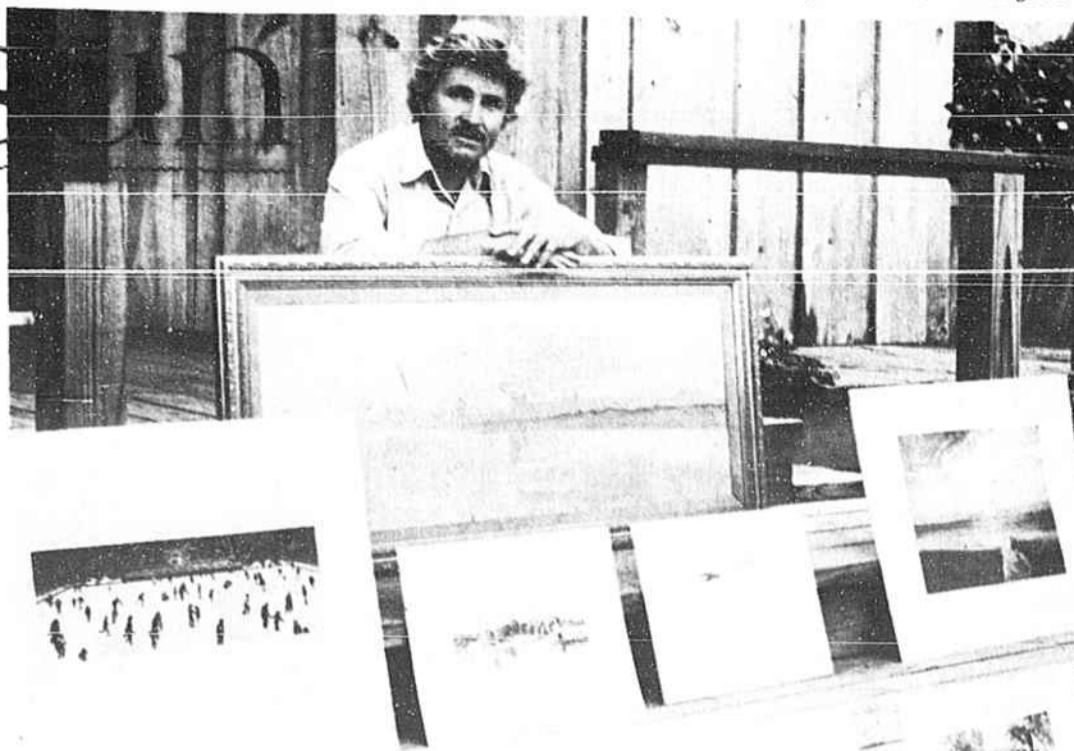
"I had a list of portraits to do as long as your arm, and I never thought I'd see the light of day again," he laughed.

"All you have to show for portraits is a lot of slides," said Buckner. "I decided to move down here and lower my overhead and become my own patron."

Along with his painting, Buckner supports himself by doing wood sculptures used to decorate the sides of beach houses. The sculptures usually feature a coastal motif with contemporary lines, but the designs can vary from a pelican to a rocking chair. Around 60 of the sculptures are on Ocean Isle now.

Except for two years during which he taught at Brunswick Technical College, Buckner hasn't been involved in many community activities; instead, he uses his time to create art.

He said, "You need concentration. It's just a dif-



ARTIST KEN BUCKNER poses with some of his paintings on the steps of his studio. Buckner, this year's

first place winner in the Brunswick County Juried Art Show, built the studio himself.

ferent lifestyle to live creatively. It doesn't always fit in with today's lifestyle. I'm not a hermit, but I try to protect my creative time and freedom."

Time is very important to Buckner.

"When I was busy," he said, "time went by so fast. I came down here and learned to slow down. All of a sudden it's like a great wealth has been bestowed upon me."

A friend of Buckner's who influenced his values was an 80-year-old native American who lived in the desert near Palm Springs, Calif.

"He saw his people shoved out and the resorts grow up," Buckner explained. "He told me a lot about nature

and things that have nothing to do with money or materialism. He wouldn't hurt anything, even a snake. He said they were all here for a reason, part of the design."

Art, according to Buckner, shouldn't be something that just hangs on the wall.

"I think the ultimate goal of art is to incorporate it into your own life. Life can be art, lived creatively. The biggest mistake is not to experience life with more depth, whatever you're into," he said.

"The bottom line is happiness. I have to trust my own life design."



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