

29th Annual Wooden Boat Show Featured Artist: Cathy Lumpkin

Cathy Lumpkin has advice to give about painting: It's never too late to start.

They're sage words from a woman who began to paint her oil-on-canvas pieces at age 50, and whose art is now featured on the 2018 Georgetown Wooden Boat Show poster. Her painting depicts a colorful and impressionistic recreation of a photo taken during the show's popular (and often hilarious) boat race, when teams of two each receive identical materials and time spans to build wooden water crafts, and then race them on the Sampit River.

While at work for her job with Coastal Eye Group as an ophthalmologic nurse, Cathy heard her coworkers talking about the boat races. She had just learned she was receiving the honor of being a boat show poster artist, and was pondering what to paint.

"Looking back at the art [from previous years' posters], there were a lot of the older boats. But everybody, whether they were interested in old boats or not, or even interested in the Wooden Boat Show, loved the boat races, because they are fun and people are screaming and children are screaming and people are falling in the water. It was just this great American fun pastime – all these people were together doing something fun and silly. It is such a part of Americana, with the flags flying and so much color and movement."

Her attraction to such an event is inevitable, since a Lowcountry perspective on Americana is where Cathy's artistic efforts have focused these past 12 years since she started painting. The granddaughter of an architect and daughter of a college art major, the Darlington native always wanted to paint.

"When I turned 50 I decided it was now or never," she said on a late spring afternoon in a quiet corner of the South Carolina Maritime Museum on Front Street in Georgetown.

Cathy majored in nursing at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, then went on to anesthesia school at Richland Memorial Hospital. She met an attorney from Georgetown named Bob

Lumpkin, whom she married. The couple settled into Estherville Plantation, an 18th-century rice plantation on the banks of the Sampit River.

Cathy's good friend, Angela Tiller, is a previous boat show poster artist, and she encouraged Cathy to take art lessons. It was frustrating at first.

She took lessons from Jef Sturm, another previous boat show artist, who requires his new students to paint eggs, "to get your values right." Cathy worked during the day, took lessons at night and for the first three months went home discouraged about her eggs.

But she did not give up, and she discovered that, "If you practice enough, take enough lessons, just really pursue it, I think art is something anybody can do." Even now, with her artwork fetching sales, Cathy continues taking lessons with Elizabeth Bronson in McClellanville, saying she still has much to learn.

From early on, her art was "all about Lowcountry." She enjoys painting oysters and fishermen and sweetgrass basket weavers and shrimp pickers.

"I'm just drawn to oystermen," she says. "I'm drawn to the beauty and the simple things of the Lowcountry and the history of it, and the beach. But for some reason oysters seem to be my focus. The older people of this area, the crabbers and the fishermen, are mostly what I've painted lately."

A few of her works are at Rice Birds gift shop, and sometimes she puts pieces at Black Mingo. Most of her art is sold during the annual Prince George Winyah Episcopal Church plantation tours, when proceeds are donated to local charities.

Cathy isn't retired – she still works at Coastal Eye Group – and at home her studio is in a former butler's room at the old plantation house. One day she might paint a slave descendant from South Island, and another day she could be inspired to paint old rice trunks, cast nets, a spottail that her husband caught or a big bowl of freshly caught crabs.

“Art teaches you to see the beauty in the simple things,” she says. “I encourage everybody to try or get involved in anything they want to do in their 50s, 60s or whenever. It’s not too late, and it opens such a different world to yourself, with a different group of friends and a different passion.”

Cathy Lumpkin’s original art will be auctioned at this year’s GOAT ISLAND YACHT CLUB REGATTA, held on Friday night before the Boat Show.

Posters featuring the piece will be available for sale for \$20 at the museum starting on August 24, 2018.

