

Artist brings plein air painting show to Burgwin-Wright House

“Local Outdoor Scenes by Plein Air Painter, Ann Lees” will open at the Burgwin-Wright House on May 25.

WILMINGTON -- Born and raised in England's dreary north, artist Ann Lees has channeled her creativity into moving toward the light. On a rainy November day, at age 14, Lees viewed a Van Gogh exhibit in the sooty city of Manchester, England. The brightness, bold color and beauty of the paintings stood in such contrast to her surroundings that Lees cried. She describes the experience as an epiphany.

Lees knew at that moment that she wanted to paint -- and in oils, but family life and career would sidetrack this ambition for many years. In the meantime, gardening became her creative outlet. After immigrating to the U.S. in 1980, she and her late husband, Anthony Lees, transformed many sad yards into lovely gardens at various residences in upstate New York, New Jersey and eventually in Wilmington. Each time they moved, Lees says, "I left my heart with the plants."

Lees discovered her perfect professional situation when she opened the The English Garden, a nursery and garden shop located in Wilmington. Since the store's closing in 2005, she took up painting in earnest and has found that the plein air genre perfectly blends her two passions, nature and art. She paints almost exclusively en plein air, retreating to the studio only when weather keeps her from being outdoors.

"I love to paint outside in nature, capturing the mood and light of the Carolina marshes, seascapes, shores and gardens," Lees says.

"Local Outdoor Scenes by Plein Air Painter, Ann Lees" will open at the Burgwin-Wright House on May 25 with a reception from 6 to 9 p.m. The show closes on June 16.

A stop on downtown Wilmington's Fourth Friday gallery walk, the Burgwin-Wright House was built in 1770 on the site of the 1744 city jail. The museum house is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday with tours offered on the hour.

The museum house hosts a variety of programs and special events, such as a talk and book signing by author Carolyn Brown on June 7. For more information, visit www.burgwinwrighthouse.org.

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Thursday, May 24, 2018 12:24 PM

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