

## REAL ESTATE PEOPLE



# Artist develops a picture perfect career

BY JASON TURCOTTE

An artist and a real estate broker may have next to nothing in common, but Karen Loew, creative director at the Academy for Continuing Education, has found a way to weave these two colorful careers together.

Loew has been painting ever since preschool.

Not yet old enough for school, she recalled watching her older brother return home with a report card and she, too, wanted something to show her parents. So, vying for her parents' attention and competing with her brother, she drew — and she drew.

Born in Western Virginia, Loew moved to small-town Ohio before going to college in Pennsylvania, her trajectory representing what folks down there refer to as “the tri-state area.” But coming from modest roots, speaking of a career in art would often turn heads.

“I came from a very blue collar family,” Loew said. “To say you’re going to art school, they’d respond, ‘you have to be kidding me.’”

While that didn’t stop Loew from following her passion, such reaction did inspire a quest to bring practicality to that pursuit. While attending

a two-year art program in Pittsburgh, she concentrated on studying commercial advertising art. And the strategy paid off when she quickly landed a position with an advertising agency in Pittsburgh after art school.

While there, Loew’s interest in New York began to blossom, since the advertising agency routinely sent her to the Big Apple to book models, organize shoots and photograph. She worked her way up to a senior level position, but work eventually “dried up” and the company folded in 1990.

From there, Loew packed up for New York, invested in a Mac and set up shop in her Manhattan apartment, working freelance and expanding her digital expertise. While she considers herself a curious, exploratory artist with “eclectic interests,” her bread and butter has always been the more traditional approaches.

“My favorite medium has always been pastels, but lately I’ve been working a lot with oils,” Loew said.

After more than a decade of freelance work, Loew would make an unlikely transition into real estate. But, first, she bumped into Esther Muller at the Angelika Theater in 2003. Both enthusiastic John Malkovich fans, and there to see his latest film, the two met and exchanged business cards. Muller later invited Loew to speak at an Academy for Continuing Education seminar.

Muller also took an interest in Loew’s work, referring a broker to the artist. It was while doing business with that broker that Loew became interested in real estate, and she took the initiative to obtain

her license, despite knowing very little about the industry.

But with a mentor like Muller, she didn’t have to.

In June 2006, Loew joined the Academy team, becoming the school’s creative director. The pairing was a natural fit and Loew has worked with Muller on deals ranging from \$283,000 to \$11.5 million.

“It was not a destination career, but I was interested in real estate as it related to architecture,” said Loew, whose favorite subjects to paint are pets and buildings featuring unique design.

The biggest challenges for an artist like Loew coming into the real estate world included acclimating herself to board packages and finance. But, having a nightmarish closing of her own, she often relates well to buyers.

“I think buyers tend to take it more personal than it really is,” Loew said. “People on the other side are just used to seeing the numbers.”

What also makes Loew’s role unique is her ability to combine her artistic creativity to an otherwise pragmatic real estate industry: Loew’s been tapped to paint properties that developers and brokers have printed in marketing materials; her work appears in Muller’s “Tips From the Top” book; and four paintings of brownstones were commissioned by the Brooklyn Marriott.

Loew also loves to travel and finds she draws plenty of inspiration from her many trips, most recently an excursion to Prague. And her volunteer work with the U.S. Coast Guard also requires the occasional trip abroad.

As chair of the Coast Guard Art Program (a division of its community relations arm based in D.C.), Loew spearheads a group of 250 artists who volunteer their work to inspire, boost morale and instill honor to those who serve in the Coast Guard. The goal is to paint the story of the many selfless members.

Her travels through this endeavor include Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and the Netherlands, where some of her work was displayed.

“All of us have a gift, and that’s something we should all consider when we volunteer,” said Loew, who calls her work with the Coast Guard a “humbling” experience.

Loew immersed herself in the Coast Guard Art Program shortly after joining the Salmagundi Club, where a painting of hers was one of 34 works displayed in a recent exhibit.

Her artistic honors include the 2001/2002 George Gray Award for the Coast Guard Art Program, a First Honorable Mention in 2002 for Salmagundi’s Member’s Summer Exhibition, a First Honorable Mention in 2006 for Salmagundi’s Member’s Christmas Theme Exhibition, and a Second Honorable Mention in 2007 for Salmagundi’s Member’s Flower Theme Exhibition.

Loew hopes to soon paint more large-scale work (since many exhibits are size restricted), and her favorite New York subject — for nostalgic reasons — includes the red lighthouse underneath the George Washington Bridge; the artifact was the subject of one of Loew’s favorite books as a child. Other examples of her work can be found by visiting [www.kloew.com](http://www.kloew.com).

