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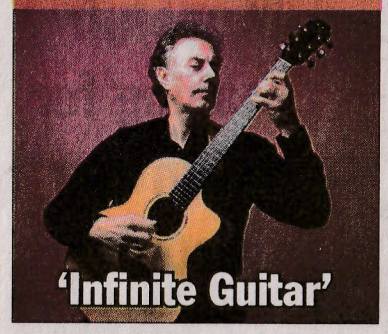

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Photographer inspires painter to recreate art

Photo courtesy of Beverly Kievman Copen

Photo courtesy of Clark "Shep" Sheppard

"SUNSET OF THE CENTURY" is Beverly Kievman Copen's phoo of a century plant and hummingbird silhouetted against a fiery orange cloudscape that won Arizona Highways Magazine's Grand Prize in 2011 (above). "Century's Final Song" is an acrylic painting by Clark "Shep" Sheppard, interpreting Copen's photograph (right).

By Erica J. Lee
LARSON NEWSPAPERS

Beverly Kievman Copen was at home in the Village of Oak Creek when she saw them in the late afternoon on July 13, 2010.

Calling for her husband, Mel, she reached for her Nikon and raced outside to the front yard. It was in the middle of Arizona's monsoon and the hummingbirds were out.

As soon as she got outside, Copen began shooting with Mel at her side. When their impromptu photo session was over, and they were looking over their shots, Mel exclaimed, "You got the hummingbird!"

That shot of a tiny hummingbird, silhouetted against a fiery orange cloudscape, hovering against the century plant's tall, flowering stalk, would win Arizona Highways Magazine's Grand Prize in 2011.

A cross-country move and 16 years later, Copen's award-winning photograph "Sunset of the Century" not only continues to inspire her, but also the longtime friend she left behind in Sedona, nurturing a loop of creativity that has inspired the pair over the years.

Clark "Shep" Sheppard is a late bloomer when it comes to art. Despite growing up with with father Kip Sheppard,

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a freelance commercial artist who worked under Max Fleischer of "Betty Boop" fame, in Edison, New Jersey, Shep didn't pick up a paintbrush until his 40s.

The camera came much earlier.

"I had won a 35 mm camera when I was in the Army," Sheppard said. He won the camera in a poker game and when he got himself a portrait lens, he realized, "that was it."

"I've really liked photography, and I have a good eye for photography," he said. "I've learned for 30 years what works and what doesn't — and I was impressed with Bev."

Sheppard met Copen in 2008 when they were playing tennis outside a VOC hotel.

"When you speak to Beverly, if Beverly says, 'How you doing? But really, how are you really doing?' She just dives into a conversation," Sheppard said.

He was drawn to her vivacity and wit. One day, Copen, who had run a modeling agency in Georgia, asked Sheppard how she could clean up an old photograph of herself with Burt Reynolds, and they got to talking about Photoshop.

"She is as sharp as can be," Sheppard said.

Sixteen years after Bev shot that hummingbird in the Village of Oak Creek, Sheppard came across the photograph again in a folder he kept titled "reference to paint."

"I came across that and I thought, 'wow! That's what I want to shoot that… I mean, paint that,'" he said.

Rendered in his signature fluorescent paint, the hummingbird came to life in vivid blue and purple, a trail of bright green hearts from its tail feathers, as it feeds off the highlighter-yellow blooms of the century plant.

With its bright orange background, the painting "Century's Final Song" stands out among the other fantastical Arizona landscapes reimagined in Sheppard's vivid image at the Village Gallery in the Village of Oak Creek.

"Sedona is such a beautiful place," said Suzen Brackell, owner of the Village Gallery. "So wherever you turn, you're being inspired by the color of the red rocks and the beauty of the land."

When customers come back to the gallery, "they're still raving about the piece that they bought the last time, they're just so in love with it.

"I believe the Village Gallery is a success because it is full of the love that everybody puts into their artwork."

"She loved it," Sheppard said when Copen saw his painting. So much so that she had to have it in her own home.

"'This is so beautiful,'" Copen remembers telling Sheppard. "That was my reaction. But what you have done is so beautiful."

She keeps a copy of "Century's Final Song" in a place where "the sunlight comes in and shines on it every afternoon" at her Georgia home of over five years.

"I've had quite a number of people tell me that I inspired them," Copen said. "I said to other people, 'what you're doing really inspires me,' so the thought was just simmering there."

That train of thought would go on to inspire an entry in the column she keeps at the Rome News-Tribune. Titled "What does the word 'inspire' mean to you," Copen, whose resume includes six books and a photography career that has taken her from China to Venice, muses over the myriad ways one can be inspired.

"To inspire, to me, is simply to help someone do something positive, something they had never thought of," she wrote.

In the case with Sheppard, whose friendship began at a Village of Oak Creek tennis court 16 years ago, their work finds ways to fuel the other's creativity.

"This painting will always carry a little piece of our friendship and your inspiration within it," Sheppard wrote to her.