

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Best in show

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LAGUNA WOODS – Imagine you’re at a restaurant. The setting sun glares at you through large bay windows overlooking Newport Beach, and the light envelops everything in color and backlights the objects in the room, forming black silhouettes.

This is the moment Laguna Woods resident Bill Gibson captured in his prize-winning painting – the one that won best in show in the Laguna Woods Art Association’s annual watercolor contest in May.

“We were out to dinner,” the 68-year-old said. “The sun was setting, but it was still glaring through the glass. So I thought, ‘You know there

is a nice composition here.’”

The exposure from the contest led to an opportunity to exhibit his work in Forest and Ocean Gallery in Laguna Beach.

The watercolor contest in Laguna Woods had been judged by Ludo Leideritz, owner and curator of the gallery.

“It was a backlit scene of a café in Newport Harbor, which made it really stand out very differently from anything else I’ve seen,” Leideritz said. “To do that well with watercolor really takes a lot skill and sense of light. It was beautifully done.”

Gibson said he had never met Leideritz, so a month after the contest he and his wife Lynn decided to visit his gallery.

“We drove down there and, sure enough, there was Ludo with a colleague,” he said. “I introduced myself and said, ‘I believe you judged the show that I won.’”

Leideritz remembered Gibson and asked him to describe his work to his colleague, so Gibson showed them pictures of his work he kept on his cellphone.

After Leideritz looked over Gibson’s paintings, he said he could sell them.

“His technique and his sense of light, color and tonality were exquisite,” Leideritz said. “The skill level I saw in the other pieces that he had were all beautifully done.”

Leideritz then asked Gibson if he would be interested in showing his work in the gallery.

“He told me he would like to see a sampling of my originals and set up an appointment date a week later,” Gibson said.

Leideritz selected six of Gibson's paintings and featured them in the gallery in August.

"I was blown away," Gibson said. "That is the only gallery I've been in. It was kind of exciting and fun."

Gibson is a graphic designer by trade. He owned his own graphic design company, Gibson Design, and advertising studio for 31 years.

"It wasn't fine arts, of course; it was commercial art," Gibson said "But what I've discovered in this last year is that I still have my design fundamentals, but I've learned to control the medium better."

As a painter, Gibson works using watercolors. His work features a blown-out look, exaggerated colorization and deep contrasts.

"I kind of just do anything that is intriguing to me," he said. "I especially like high contrast between lights and darks."

He paints everyday scenes that he and his wife photograph for them to paint.

"I don't try to copy a photograph," Gibson said. "I try to capture the things I want to capture and leave out the other things. If you simplify things it is more artistic."

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