

Canine Art and Influences in Boulder County

By Karuna Eberl *for At Home*

Canines. They've been an integral part of life in the Boulder Valley since the beginning. As a species, they've stood with us through the best and worst of times - some believe they even helped us beat out Neanderthals in the evolutionary ladder. So it's not surprising to find out that they've also become a driving force behind many artistic creations, especially in Boulder County.

Boulder artist Linda O'Neill's love for dogs entered her work a few years ago, when she started painting contemporary portraits of her favorite furry friends, including her golden retriever-Australian shepherd mix, Abby.

"I just have such a love and connection with dogs," she says. "My own dog inspired me. She's such a treasure to us, and in general, dogs are such a healing force in our lives... their companionship, their unconditional love, their insight and everything about them. I love to try to capture that in a painting."

While O'Neill still pays most of the bills through her company Digital Images, doing photo restoration and image manipulation, she continues to see an increase in the number of commissioned portraits, which she's thrilled about. She's also developed a line of greeting cards.

"People are nuts over their dogs and I can totally understand [why] they love to immortalize them," she says.

Boulder writer Leslie O'Kane has also incorporated dogs into her work. Her mystery series features dog psychologist Allie Babcock - a single woman in her late twenties who runs a "dog-behaviorist" business in Boulder.

O'Kane says the character was inspired after she read an article in the Daily Camera about a dog with separation anxiety whose owner took him to doggie daycare every day.

"I thought to myself, 'Only in Boulder,'" she says. But then she realized having a dog psychiatrist as a sleuth would solve the challenge of featuring dogs in a series - dog owners tend to want to read about their particular breed, and O'Kane's sleuth can deal with several breeds in every book.

In her second book, "Ruff Way to Go," O'Kane explains through her heroine, Allie, how dogs have helped her through the loneliest times in her life.

"That came straight from my heart," says O'Kane. "Dogs give their owners unconditional love... we all need that in our lives."

Today, O'Kane draws her inspiration from her cocker spaniel Taffy. And though most of her fans are dog lovers, she has received letters from people who say they are dog phobic, but through her books have come to understand why others care for their dogs so dearly.

"They're such a gift to us," says O'Neill. "People love their dogs so much, and when I do a painting that really touches someone, there's nothing better."

Look for examples of O'Neill's work at Struttin' Pup in Lafayette, the Boulder Humane Society Thrift and Gift Shop, and on her Web site, www.d-images.com. O'Kane's books can be found at High Crimes Mystery Bookshop on Pearly Street and on her Web site, <http://members.aol.com/lesokane>

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