

FLORIDA FIND

A Caribbean love affair

For Grove artist, life imitates art

BY MIREYA NOVO

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Artist Eileen Seitz treats us to watermelon for breakfast in the house her architect husband, J Beattie, built for them in Coconut Grove. The home boasts enormous windows, soaring ceilings and a skylight that afford us a magnificent view of her tropical garden. It's a cozy place to be on a rainy morning. Her bright watercolors, hanging everywhere, appear to be an extension of the lush Grove setting. It's a matter of life imitating art.

In reality, Seitz was born into a world light years away from the tropical splendor she would later idealize in her paintings. Born and raised in Manhattan, her artistic bent surfaced early:

she began drawing as a precocious 8-year-old and at 16 sold her first painting to a New York City art dealer. After high school, she was admitted to the prestigious Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, but she dreamed of faraway places and took time off to travel.

Her journey of discovery

right back to the Garden of Eden," says Seitz. The trip became a sort of epiphany for her, so much so that she spent months living on the islands and even worked on a farm in Eleuthera.

With a friend, she hitchhiked through Mexico. "I wanted to live the exact opposite of the concrete jungle," she

said. "I found the beauty of these places overwhelming." As she discovered this new world, she also began capturing its beauty on canvas. "Each painting has a spiritual personality of its own, as the culture,

climate and nature it rejoices in," Seitz said.

Seitz moved to Coconut Grove in the early '80s and began publishing her paint-

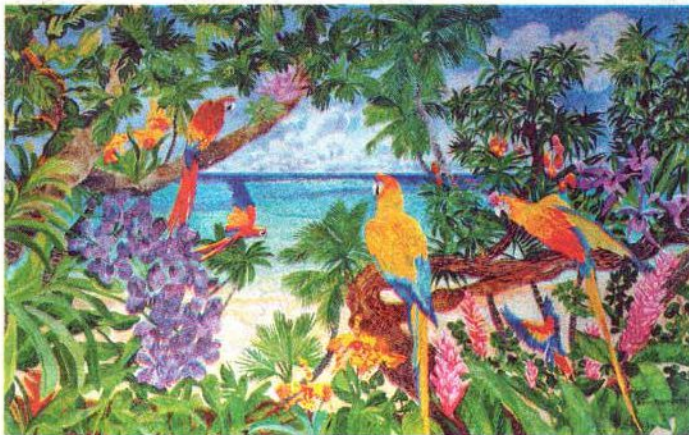


STEPPING INTO A PAINTING: An admirer of Seitz's framed painting of an island scene, top, turned it into reality in Exuma, the Bahamas. He built identical houses there and invited the artist to see it. 'It was like walking into a dream,' she said.



PETER ANDREW BOSCH/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

HER GARDENS OF EDEN: Eileen Seitz visited the Caribbean at age 21 and fell in love with the light and colors of the islands. She has captured the tropical scene in her bright watercolors, above and below.



EILEEN SEITZ FINE ART

Prices: greeting cards, \$3; posters, \$30; paintings, \$600 to \$10,000; rugs start at \$1,682 plus shipping. Call 305-443-1416.

ings as art cards, posters and prints. They have been commissioned for use as art festival posters, purchased for television and movies, and bought by international hotels and airports.

She was poster artist for the Beaux Arts and Goom-bay festivals, among others, and, not surprisingly, her tropical prints hang at the restaurants of the popular Pollo Tropical chain throughout the state. A few years ago, she branched into rug design. Made in Mexico of 100 percent New Zealand wool, the rugs are either based on her paintings or clients' requests. "But I won't do coffee mugs or T-shirts,"

she grins. "I don't want to see my work at a gas station on the Turnpike."

But she did find her work on a beach in the Bahamas. A client called and asked, "Would it be OK with you if I take your art and create a house?" David Pauley had fallen in love with her painting, *Sophia's Rest*, a bucolic scene of two West Indian houses on the coast.

An engineer who lives in the Florida Keys, Pauley decided to build a house exactly like the Seitz painting that hung in his bedroom. "My wife and I had always been fond of the Bahamas, so we took trips there looking for lots. I

ended up commuting there for a year until the house was finished," he said.

"He even sent me the blueprints," Seitz recalled excitedly, "and then some months later, I received an e-mail saying, 'do you want to visit?'" Pauley had duplicated her painting in Exuma, Bahamas.

"Marie and I contacted Eileen thinking she might be interested in someone nuts enough to build the house from one of her paintings in the Bahamas, so we invited her out to see the results," Pauley said.

"It was like walking into a dream," said Seitz, who spent several days in Exuma. "I was sleeping in my own painting."

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