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John Duncan McLaren Wins Discovery Park of America's Artist Showcase

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UNION CITY, TN-A skipper? A professor? An artist? Who is John Duncan McLaren? A husband. A grandfather. An art teacher. Yes, all of these, and, most recently, the winner of the Local Artist Showcase at Discovery Park of America. Eight of his works will be on exhibit July through December at Discovery Park of America. The collection, titled "Women in Hats", will be found on the lower level of Discovery Center near Art Hall.

The community is invited to a reception to meet the artist and be among the first to see the exhibit. The reception will be held on Friday, July 7th at 5:30 in Discovery Center and is free to attend. There will be light hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar available.

John met and married the love-of-his-life while teaching Physics at Murray State University. His wife, Cindy, is still by his side and encourages his artistic endeavors. Having enjoyed a career that led him from sailboats to college professor, John has finally given way to the whisper to 'be an artist' that has lived in him since childhood. "I've always sketched and drawn people," he said. "Even as a little boy, I loved to draw faces." And though, "life happened," as he says, he never stopped honing his skills and practicing art. "It was always my hobby," he said.

Although John has created art most of his life, he didn't submit anything into competition or show his work publicly until 2015. Since then, he has won numerous awards and regularly shows his work at the PAPA Gallery in Paducah, KY, as well as other regional gallery exhibits, in addition to Discovery Park. He has also begun to teach art and do commission work.

After a full career as a professor at Murray State, John and Cindy cruised the East Coast and Bahamas for ten years, living on a sailboat. "We started in Annapolis," John said, "and then, just sort of worked our way south." During this time, he honed his skills with watercolor, due to its convenience in a limited space environment. Many of his works were inspired by photographs of people that he met along life's way. Recently, he has also begun to paint live models, and offers a "life-art" workshop every-other Monday night at the Murray Art Guild in Murray, KY, where he and his wife now make their home.

Cindy frames the pieces that John displays in galleries and enters into competition. "I am behind," Cindy explained. "John probably has 300 pieces that have not been framed." John also makes frames out of raw lumber and reclaimed wood that he finds in his explorations. "The frame around 'Jenny,' which is part of the collection on display at Discovery Park, was made from an old teak cap rail that John salvaged from Jennings' Boatyard in Reedville, VA, where we often kept our boat," she said.

Education Director, Chris Gunlefinger says he is amazed at the detail in John's work considering that the eight pieces on display at Discovery Park were created using watercolor or pastels. "His art is truly amazing, and we hope that anyone who enjoys art will take the opportunity to see John's work while it is here through December," he added.

The works on display at the park are entitled:

- Far From Home
- Jenny on High Country
- Pink Cap
- Annie from the Outback
- Audrey
- The Geisha
- Dorisanna at the Outer Banks

For more information about John McLaren, please visit his website at www.teaksouls.com . "We are extremely glad that John entered his work and are excited to have it on display at Discovery Park," Gunlefinger stated.

Discovery Park of America opened November of 2013 and was founded by Robert Kirkland as a unique educational venue with many interactive and fun features like an Earthquake Simulator, Starship Theater and a unique observation Tower. The 50-acre park is loaded with exhibits, and has been referred to as a miniature Smithsonian. Consistently getting 5 stars on Trip Advisor, people drive for hours to visit the park and often purchase a two day ticket in order to see it all. Discovery Park of America is located at 830 Everett Blvd., in Union City, TN. The park's website is www.discoveryparkofamerica.com and the phone number is 731-885-5455.