

EVERY INCH OF JAN AND GUS MILLER'S HOME IS FILLED WITH THEIR ART  
**ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE**

BY ERICK GILL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID MOULTON

**A**fter more than 40 years of marriage and a lifetime spent as working artists, both Janvier (“Jan”) and Gustaf (“Gus”) Miller found themselves working with a new medium this past fall. Instead of painting a series of shoes on a large white canvas or splattering paint on wooden blocks shaped into a series of characters, Jan and Gus spent much of October painting drywall.

The drywall project was an attempt to create a new avant-garde series where sections of drywall replace canvas. But their project was for practical purposes, not artistic. Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne damaged the Miller’s roof, allowing water to creep in through the ceilings and down the walls of their oceanfront home. “It’s a constant battle: Do you finish the painting you’re working on or do you clean up the yard?” says Jan on a warm October afternoon as she surveys the mold she’s been trying to evict from her second-floor studio.

Besides the leaky roof and debris scattered around their yard, the Millers’ home survived the storms. Luckily, the couple’s artwork, sculptures and homemade furniture that fill the house made it through the storms without a scratch.

The Millers took precautions by protecting their artwork and storing it in a room they felt was safe from the wind and water. That project alone was a massive undertaking. Virtually every room in their home is either used as a working studio or a display gallery, from their woodshop garage to the pottery foyer. Inside the home, large abstracts hang on light gray walls in the living room; a multi-colored, “Tutti Frutti” tile floor



Gus and Jan Miller at their beachfront home in Vero Beach. “After 40 years of marriage, we give each other space,” says Jan. “I work mornings, he works evenings.”



This wall in Gus's studio displays the range of his work. "The creative process never grows stale because you can always change mediums," he says.

liven up the kitchen, and stacks of canvases are neatly tucked into every corner.

It's clear that art consumes every aspect of the Millers' lives. Through the years, they've seen their works displayed in the Boston Museum of Fine Art, the Berkshire Museum, the Newport Art Museum and the Rhode Island School of Design. Gus has sold sculptures to clients in London and Paris and one of Jan's silk-screen prints was the inspiration for a ballet at Suffolk University in Boston. They've even sold their works at outdoor art shows, camping with their son and daughter at various state parks.

As they get older, the Millers realize they're not as concerned as they used to be about marketing and competing against other artists. They're more focused on creating quality art, and



The view from Gus's studio provides a scenic backdrop for his creativity as an artist.

time working various jobs connected to art. They taught art classes in elementary schools and universities, and owned an art supply store for a while, in addition to owning, managing and operating several art galleries in Massachusetts and Florida. From 1980 to 1995, they co-owned the Lange Miller Gallery in Chatham, Massachusetts, and from 1998 to 2001, they were part owners of the Ocean Drive Gallery in Vero Beach. The couple spent a year in Rome following college, where Gus had bronze sculptures cast. After that, they returned to Massachusetts, where Gus began welding steel sculptures.

"I was so glad when he quit that, because I was worried he was going to cut off a leg," says Jan.

As the Millers talk, it becomes clear that they've enjoyed being married for the last four decades. They interact like the perfect married couples you see on television and in the movies: the kind who know each other's stories, often finishing them before the other can. Even though they disagree about specific details, they tell their stories with smiles and loving glances. For example, Gus believes they moved to Vero Beach in 1986; Jan says it was 1985.

"No, we bought the house in '85, we moved in in '86," says Gus. As he tries to correct Jan, the statement comes across without any hint of negativity, but rather as a playful part of their routine.

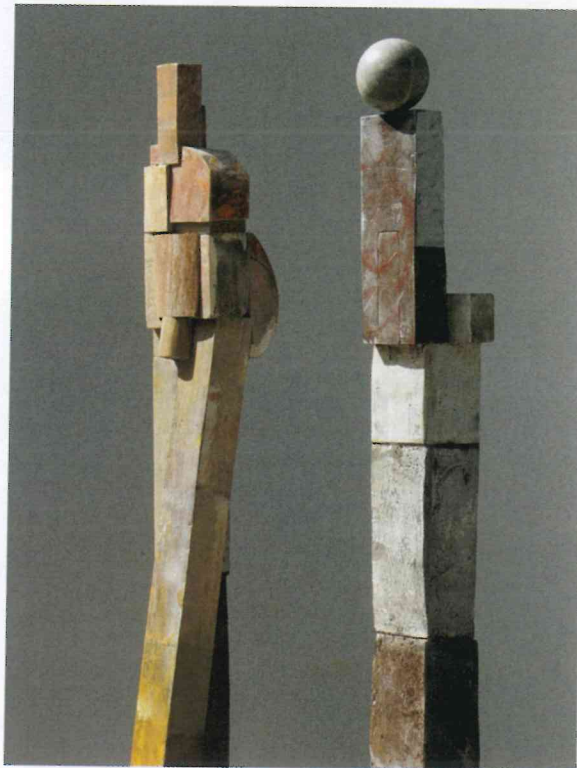
They decided to relocate from Massachusetts to Vero Beach because their children were in college and they were tired of the cold northern winters.

"Indian River County seemed like the least spoiled area of the state," says Gus, adding that he and Jan spent a few months touring both coasts of Florida before choosing a real estate agent in Vero Beach.

"We spent some time explaining what we were looking for and this was the first place we saw," says Gus. "We saw one other house to make sure this was



These stacked figures are part of Gus Miller's collection of wooden creations. He keeps several sketchbooks around the house so he can jot down new ideas whenever inspiration strikes.



Two more wooden sculptures by Gus – *Yellow Legs* and *Mr. Ball II*.

the right one.”

A major factor in their decision to relocate to Vero Beach was that the community was building an art museum at the time.

“We’ve made wonderful friends through the museum,” says Gus.

“We’re pleased that the community is so behind the arts in general,” adds Jan, mentioning local theaters, art groups and concert associations.

Jan, who didn’t completely focus on her art until her children were in junior high, recently held a one-woman show at the Vero Beach Museum of Art.

Now that their kids are grown – their son is an architect in Seattle and their daughter lives in Massachusetts – the Millers enjoy summers up north with their two granddaughters, introducing them to the art world.

“It has been great fun to take them *en plein air* painting,” Jan says. “And dragging them through museums,” Gus adds. The Millers share their summer studio with their granddaughters.

This summer, the Millers introduced the girls to the other side of the canvas.

“We realized they are growing up. Already, they are 11 and 13. We knew we wanted to get portraits done while they were still young,” Jan explains. “They enjoyed the adventure of being models – for the first half-hour, anyway.”

**N**ot only do Gus and Jan complement each other as husband and wife, they make perfect artistic partners, a delicate balance of yin and yang. Gus is a sculptor and painter who mainly focuses on abstract works. Jan is into pottery and painting, concentrating on still lifes.

“After 40 years of marriage, we give each other space. I work mornings, he works evenings,” Jan says. “Gus is more of a night owl.”

“Unless I’m on a deadline; then I’ll work straight through the day,” Gus says.

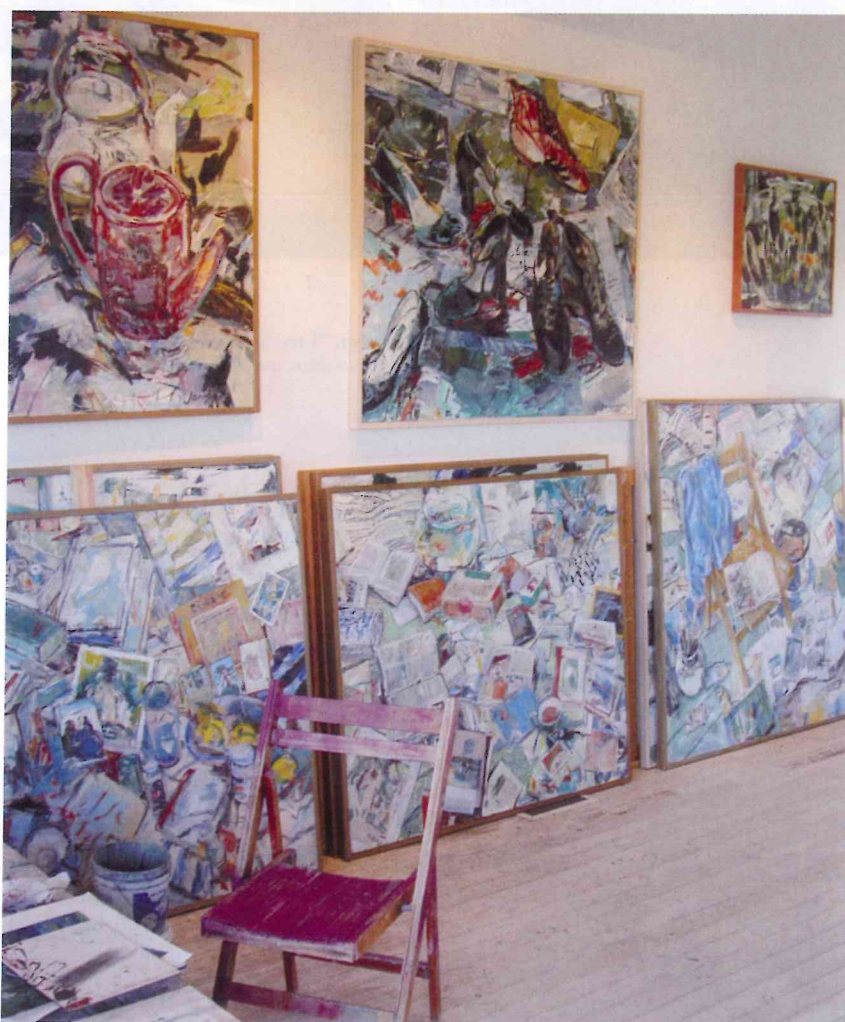
Even their hobbies are wrapped up in



Jan Miller's  
*Drawing Table*, an  
acrylic on canvas.

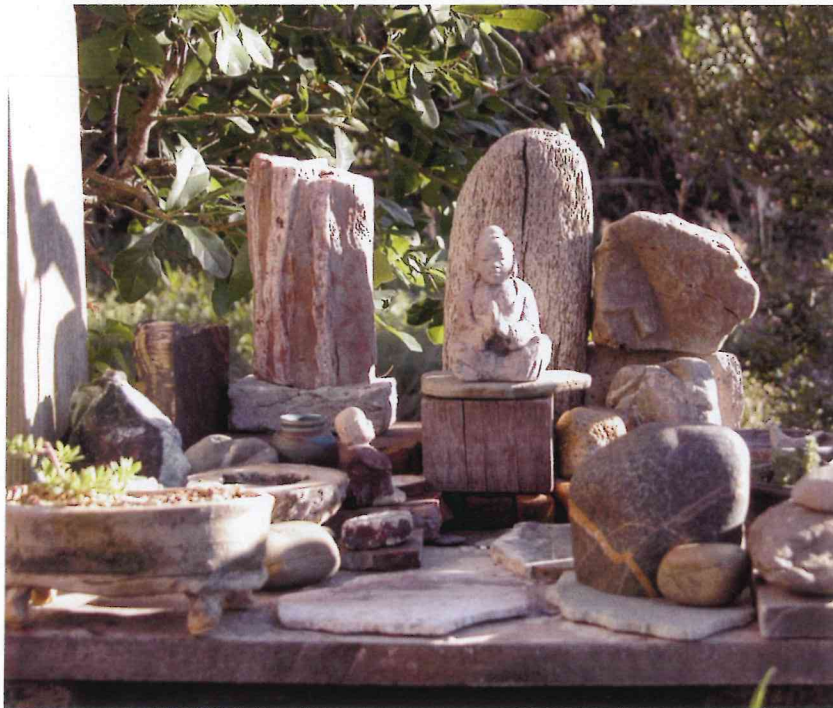
Opposite: This corner of Jan's studio displays her affinity for the works of leading Impressionists, including Cezanne and Matisse.

The walls of Jan's studio are constantly changing.





Gus sculpted this juniper bonsai in rock and placed it in the couple's Zen Garden.



These sculptures of Buddha and a monk are also displayed in the rock garden.

thrown on there," he says.

While Gus may jump from one subject to another, creating wooden sculptures of downtown buildings or schoolchildren with backpacks heading to class, Jan tends to keep her art focused on specific subjects.

"I work with themes more than Gus does," she explains, adding that she is currently creating a series of still-life paintings using clothing as the subject matter.

Jan draws inspiration from artists such as Cezanne and Matisse, but also finds the process of painting extremely motivating. "I like to push paint around with spontaneity and force. I'll work with an idea on different canvases, working on several at once," she says. "I did a series of boat paintings, and I quickly found out that sailboats sold but motorboats didn't. Color sells; black and white doesn't."

As Jan talks Gus chimes in: "As an artist you're supposed to be above sales."

It's safe to say that the Millers are "above sales." They create art because it's what they were born to do, and as Jan says, "because it's fun."

Jan subscribes to the old adage: "It's not what you paint, it's how you paint it." A critic with the *Boston Globe* once wrote: "These still lifes aren't at all that still," referring to Jan's work. Her subjects have ranged from tea pots and paint cans to fish bowls and gardening tools.

"I enjoyed doing a series of beach chairs, several of the same kind on one canvas. They became pattern-like," Jan says. "The latest digression has been doing a series of small fruit and vegetable paintings for the Candler Gallery."

Despite the fact that they've been creating art all of their lives, both Jan and Gus say the creating process remains as fresh as when they started. "It never grows stale because you can always change mediums," says Gus. "Inspiration can come from anything – even a post at a con-



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ONE OF THE MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR AN ARTIST IS TO KNOW WHEN A PIECE OF WORK IS COMPLETE.

JAN TENDS TO FINISH MOST OF HER CANVASES IN ABOUT A MONTH, WHILE GUS WILL SOMETIMES WORK ON A PROJECT FOR YEARS.

struction site that's covered with signs or tape."

Jan sometimes finds her muse in unfinished works.

"Remaining motivated while being self-employed is a special problem," she says. "I try to leave something undone from the previous day. That way, it helps to draw me back into the studio and spark something else."

Gus constantly doodles and draws ideas in sketchbooks that he keeps around the house. The small books are filled with impressive black ink drawings of nudes and abstract stacks of circles and squares.

"His sketch books are fabulous. They should be in a museum," Jan says. For the Millers, life inspires art and art inspires life.

"There is a series that I did inspired by all the pottery I do. Each large canvas had one large pot," Jan says.

When Gus illustrated the children's book *HATS Off for the Fourth of July*, it led to a series of wooden sculptures featuring characters from the book.

One of the major challenges for an artist is to know when a piece of work is complete. Jan tends to finish most of her canvases in about a month, while Gus will sometimes work on a project for years.

"If they hang around the house, I'll continue to find things to fix," he says.

In addition to galleries and private homes, the Millers' artwork can be found all over the Treasure Coast, supporting various not-for-profits such as McKee Botanical Garden, the Audubon Society, the Bonsai Club and the Humane Society.

"This year the bowls I made for the [Community Outreach] Food Pantry's Soup Day said, 'Enjoy Soup with Friends,' so I painted a couple of birds on each one," Jan recalls. "We call ourselves Seagrape Studio when we work jointly on clay projects like the bonsai containers we made for Gardenfest last year."

With their lives so wrapped up in art, one wonders what the Millers do to relax and get away from work. Gus enjoys swimming in the ocean and Jan goes to a local gym. They both like to kayak, but most of the time, they say, that leads "to landscape painting outdoors with artist friends."

"We just can't get away from it," says Gus. "But then, we really don't want to." ❀



Jan at work in the pottery room. "I try to leave something undone from the previous day," she says. "That way, it helps to draw me back into the studio and spark something else."

art. Gus spends his mornings sculpting bonsai trees in their pebble-covered Zen Garden. The perfectly manicured trees are planted in pots and rocks that have been hand-crafted by Gus or Jan.

"It's a nice contrast of things to do: art and the bonsai trees, whereas with me it's art and pottery," says Jan.

Just weeks before the presidential election, Gus displayed two of his recent sculptures: a pair of campaigners, one endorsing George W. Bush and the other, John Kerry. Each is created from wood and covered with political messages and newspaper headlines.

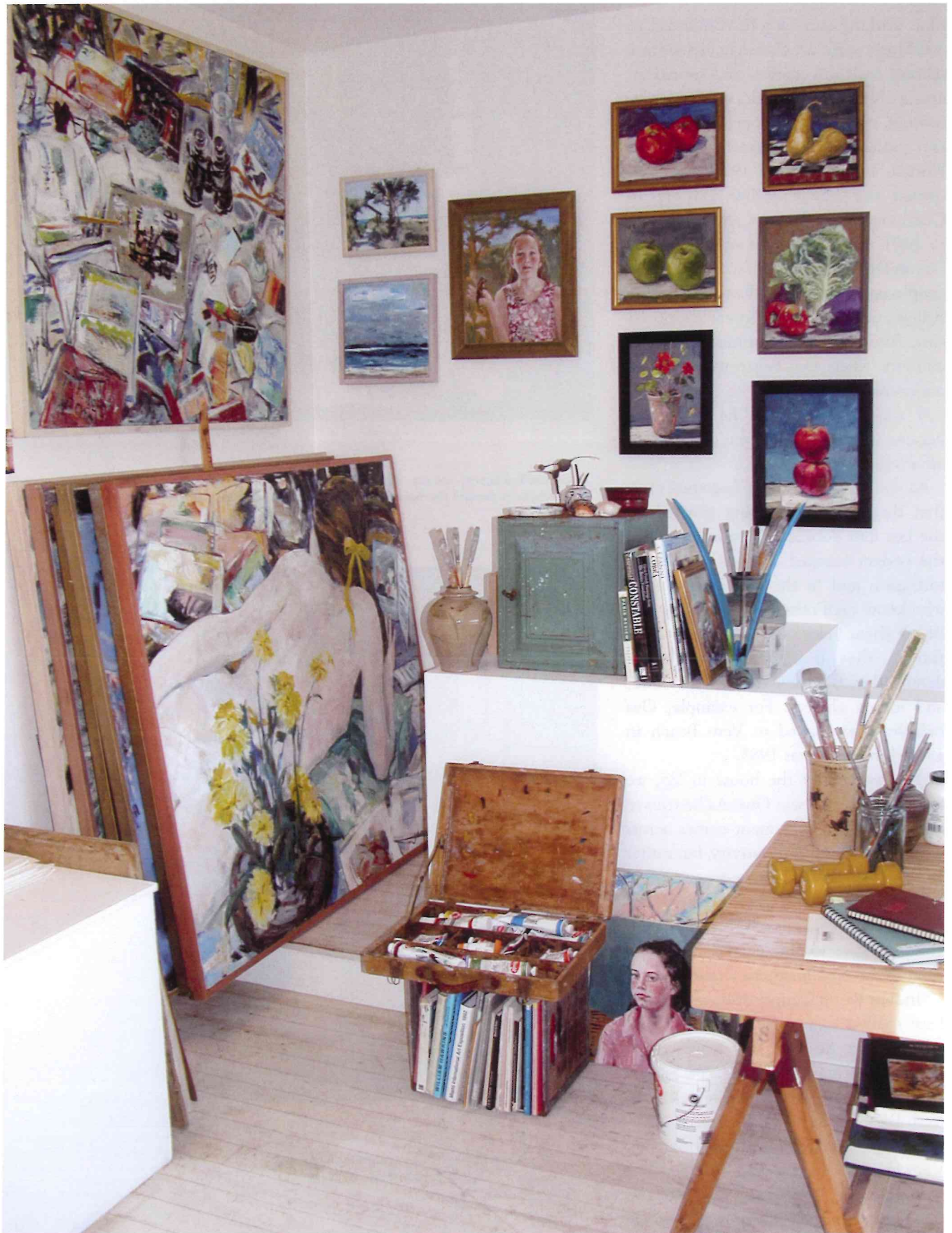
"I'm getting into a childish phase,"

explains Gus. "Stacking up children's blocks and getting more geometrical. I like abstracts, which recognize everything that has taken place in the art world over the last 50 years."

Gus points to expressionist Paul Klee and Dada artist Kurt Schwitters as influences. He even has a small wire and rock "portrait" of Schwitters he made on his desk next to a computer.

"I'm trained as a painter, not as a sculptor," says Gus. "So I guess you can say I am a self-taught sculptor."

He admits to spending "an awful lot of time" painting his sculptures. "It takes a lot of work to make it look like it's just







“I’m trained as a painter, not as a sculptor,” says Gus, who enjoys doing offbeat sculptures such as this collection of terra-cotta women.

enjoying the process.

“I think I like the idea that art has just become a habit,” says Jan.

“What else are you going to do? You reach a point where you can’t go back to school and become a stockbroker,” chuckles Gus.



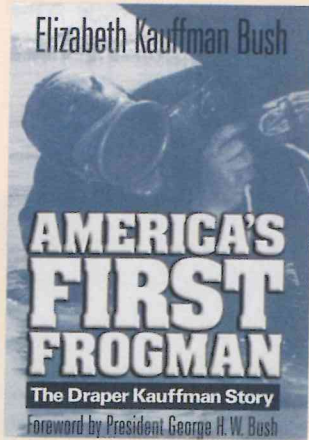
Before last year’s presidential election, Gus sculpted these playful figures of campaigners for John Kerry and George W. Bush.

Gus’s and Jan’s introduction into the art world began at a young age. Gus’s father taught him how to create watercolors, while Jan’s mother groomed her daughter toward still life and portrait work. Their introduction to each other took place at Syracuse University in an art history class that Gus had to repeat because, according to Jan, he usually partied too hard the night before.

“Class was right after lunch. The professor would darken the room to show slides. This guy could talk for an hour on one slide,” explains Gus. “It seemed like a good opportunity for a siesta!”

After class, Gus would give Jan a ride home, even though she would often end up pushing his Volkswagen when it ran out of gas. Not because they were starving artists, but because Gus said the gas gauge didn’t work.

Throughout their careers, both spent



It took Beth 10 years to complete her book about her brother's amazing life.

enrolled for any classes he was taking.”

After a year at Berkeley, the family moved once again when James Kauffman was transferred to Washington, D.C. There, Beth's mother insisted that she should take a course in typing and shorthand, which led to a job as receptionist at the British embassy. There was one condition of employment — she must never use “those dreadful American tea bags” when making tea for the ambassador.

In 1943, Beth found herself living in Miami, where her father was now commandant of the Seventh Naval District. She recalls how angry she got when she walked on the beaches and saw dozens of brown bodies tanning in the sun. “I remember several were shading their eyes with copies of the *Miami Herald*. The front-page headline screamed BATAAN DEATH MARCH, and the story told how American POWs were being marched to their deaths by the Japanese. These tourists had been asked to stay away from South Florida by the government because they were occupying rooms that should have been available to the military, and their indifference to what our men were going through infuriated me.”

The following year, Beth became engaged to Prescott, whom she had met at a dinner party. Like her brother, he suffered from bad eyesight, and also had a bum knee that made his active participation in the war impossible. Instead, he was working on a Navy airport development program supervised by Pan American, and would be leaving shortly for a long stay in Brazil. He and Beth were married on Dec. 30, 1944, just in time for her to accompany him to South America. Neither Beth's father or brother were able to attend due to their



JOHN EISINGER

Prescott and Beth Bush at home in Vero Beach. Both aged 82, they still lead busy lives here and in Connecticut.

war service; instead, George Bush, who was home on leave from the Pacific, acted as his brother's best man. A couple of weeks later, Prescott returned the favor when he acted as best man at George's wedding to Barbara Pierce, a dark-haired young woman who, many years later, would become famous as the nation's white-haired first lady.

When Beth and Prescott returned to the U.S. from Brazil in 1947 they settled into a home in Greenwich, Connecticut, so that Prescott could take up a job in New York with the Johnson & Higgins insurance firm.

Now retired, he still acts as a business consultant, and makes frequent trips to China. The couple have three children, Prescott III, 59, a writer and musician, Kelsey, 57, who is married to a paper-company executive from Montreal, and James, 49, who works in insurance.

In 2001, the Bushes decided the time had come to spend part of each year in a warmer climate. After exploring Florida, they chose Vero Beach, mainly, Beth says, because they had more than a dozen classmates living in the area. They now own a two-bedroom condo, and continue to live their lives at a busy pace, despite the fact that they are both 82. Beth likes to point out that she is her husband's senior by two months.

“I never let him forget it,” she jokes.

