

Witness a child jumping in the ocean surf, feeling cool, gooey sand between his toes as waves spray and tickle his whole body. His hair askew, his eyes as wide as the sea, limbs spread to feel the sensation, and laughter of pure joy bursting forth from deep within. St. Simons Island artist Rita S. Trudeau's watercolor paintings capture just such divine moments celebrating life.

Take a close look at the faces of Trudeau's subjects and you can see their personalities. As a member of the Portrait Society of America, one of Trudeau's favorite subjects is the human figure, and many of her portraits are commissioned works. She began her career drawing the human form as a fashion illustrator in the 1940s for Read's Department Store in Bridgeport, Conn. At a time when the fashion industry had no simple electronic means to produce images of their new clothing designs, the industry relied on artists' pen-and-ink renderings. Each day the department store selected the clothing it wanted published in the newspaper.

"One of the store employees would bring a piece of clothing, such as lingerie or a dress, and I would have to draw it by the end of the day to be printed in the next day's newspaper," says Trudeau. She also freelanced for New York Department Stores, drawing children's fashions for back-to-school catalogs.

For a number of years her art took a backseat to family life as she raised her three daughters. However, since moving to the Golden Isles in 1991, she has become rededicated to her art.

"Moving to St. Simons Island was the best decision I've made in my whole life," says Trudeau. Not only

was the move right because her art has flourished, but the coastal Georgia weather is much better than that of New England.

"Winters in Cape Cod are long and dreary," she says of her former home.

Trudeau's St. Simons Island studio and home is like a small, cozy gallery showcasing her work and her life. Each painting has a story. Her landscape of Michelangelo's Plaza was painted on her Plein Air workshop tour of Italy. A

Family and friends are frequent subjects in her painting. The pale blue sunlight bounces off the sea and surrounds Trudeau's granddaughter and toddler great-grandson in one painting. In another, the three young daughters of a friend dance on the beach as their pink dresses fly. The sea or water is often a feature or subject in her work.

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landscape of the Maine coast reminds her of her brush with fame when she encountered Andrew Wyeth at an Italian restaurant in Maine.

"I spotted a white haired man in a long nylon coat walk in. It was Andrew Wyeth, his son James, and his family celebrating his 80th birthday," says Trudeau with a smile.

Trudeau's favorite medium is watercolor because she enjoys how it has a way of surprising and forgiving the artist.

"If I make a mistake, somehow the way watercolors blend, it always turns out all right," says Trudeau. She jokes that if she painted in oil she would never finish a work because she would never stop painting corrections.

