

When the wall becomes the art

By **Patrice Brymner**
CORRESPONDENT

Stow painter Brenda Blatchford Cirioni's artwork can be found in many area homes, but most of it doesn't hang in frames. Cirioni, once a full-time studio artist, and a graduate of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts/Tufts University, now creates art directly onto the walls of her client's homes as murals, trompe l'oeil and in decorative and faux finishes.

Cirioni explains that her creative satisfaction now comes through making a difference in

people's lives on levels not available to a studio artist.

Cirioni came to decorative painting nearly 10 years after completing the museum school's four-year studio program and its fifth-year certificate program. Initially, she painted full time as a studio artist while waiting tables at night in Boston. During those early years, Cirioni had an agent and showed and sold her paintings in group and solo exhibitions in Boston galleries and at the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln, as well as the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield. Her paintings still hang in private collec-

tions in the Boston area, and as far away as Maryland, and Texas.

These works, primarily oil on paper, have a mythical quality, without being overtly whimsical. They are impressionistic landscapes, which Cirioni acknowledges, display an evolution from a bleak beauty in her early work, to a delicate fullness in her later work.

After marrying and moving to Maynard in 1989, Cirioni continued to paint by day and wait tables at night, she says, but found it difficult to find the time to paint through the early 1990s when her son was a toddler. Facing economic realities as well, she began to wonder if there wasn't some other way to make a living through art.

"I couldn't just paint and hope that something would sell," she explains.

Then, while waiting tables one night, Cirioni met a local decorative painter and realized that she had perhaps found a way to paint full time and make a living. Soon after, Cirioni founded her company, MaisonArt, which integrates her art into a business that

reaches people in what she says is "a functional" and "non-threatening way" in their homes.

Cirioni's personal artistic style, as developed in her studio work, is evident in her interior painting. However, on her client's walls, Cirioni's range of style is far greater. Her professional portfolio includes: a Westwood foyer with walls painted to look like stone blocks; a thunderstorm painted on the ceiling of a master bedroom; another bedroom, with a mermaid and starfish mural; a bold geometric pattern in blues, bronze, tan, and beige on a free-standing wall in a contemporary Sudbury home; a long, narrow hallway in Medford made expansive with a landscape mural; whimsical flowers on a bright blue wall in Sudbury; or simply a custom-stenciled leaf and vine border high on the wall of a sun-room in Needham.

"I get to go into a house, see the architectural flaws, and see what I can do to make that [interior] infinitely better," Cirioni says. Sometimes the solutions do not call for something as obvious when completed as a mural or a

specific decorative element.

Referring to a photograph of a large foyer with a 20-foot-high ceiling, Cirioni explains the challenge she faced.

"The proportions were all wrong," she recalls. "The doors leading out of the foyer were standard size and were dwarfed by the space. I had to beef up the crown molding and baseboards from three inches to six inches, and paint it to look like the existing marble floor. Then, over one of the doors, I painted a fan light, again, picking up the colors from the marble floor."

Cirioni says she sometimes stays in touch with her clients and gets to see how families live in and enjoy the art she has left behind. Looking up at her own handiwork at a current job site, Cirioni anticipates her client's enjoyment of a space transformed by color and texture: "They get to live with this for years and years."

Brenda Blatchford Cirioni lives with her husband and son in Stow and operates MaisonArt. She can be reached at 978-897-5917.