

El Pasoan in Paris reveals

by Myrna Zanetell

With nearly 1,000 galleries and 91 museums, artists continue to flock to Paris, says former El Pasoan Ann Massey, who for the past four years has lived that artist's dream.

"For an artist, the environment is quite inspiring because the arts are part of daily life. I can open my window and hear live music at almost any hour, day or night.

"In my building alone we have had a pianist, flutist, saxophonist, rock musician and a voice instructor," says Massey.

In 1994, the artist closed her Santa Teresa gallery and moved to France.

She lives on the fourth floor (with no elevator) of a typical Parisian apartment building, constructed in 1912. It has high ceilings and wood floors, and impressive and varied ceiling moldings decorate each room.

The living area is lined with bookshelves filled with Massey's collection of art books, and her easel occupies one corner, along with a cabinet for her painting materials.

"Believe me, there is never any question of keeping in shape around here," she says. "I live on the fourth floor, so it's up and down stairs several



Nude by Ann James Massey

times a day — plus the fact that I walk everywhere.

"My butcher, baker, doctor, a copy place, a frame shop and nine different kinds of Oriental restaurants are all within a block of my door. A few blocks farther on, I have a grocery store, park and post office."

Living in Paris has inspired Massey's work. This year alone, her oil, "The Marionette Shop" (now in the private collection of El Paso's Gail Darling), has garnered numerous awards, including the Director's Award at the American Artists Professional League exhibition in New York and a second prize at the Women Artists of the West show in

Biloxi, Miss., where it was selected as the Show Poster.

Considered a master of waxed pencil, which involves thousands of exceedingly fine pencil strokes to achieve perfect shading and detail, she also is an award-winning oil painter.

"Whenever I need reassurance, I just look out my French windows and I can see the top third of the Eiffel Tower just

over the Grande Garage de Paris. At night it looks like lace, and I still find myself gazing in awe at this impressive monument. However, the irony is I'll never visit it. I'm not fond of heights and I hate tourist crowds!"

Massey has recently been invited to join the venerable Society of Women Artists, founded in 1855 in England. Its membership is limited to 135 artists worldwide.

In addition, two of her most recent nude drawings are being printed and distributed by the English fine art publishing firm of Solomon and Whitehead, Ltd.

in the art scene

Ann Massey's take on art vs. tourism

Artist Ann Massey offers these reflections on the top two Parisian destinations for art fanciers: Montmartre and the Louvre.

The Montmartre

"When Paris comes to mind, people visualize paintings such as Toulouse-Lautrec's can-can girls and Manet's painting of the bartendress in the Moulin Rouge, so they are certain this area must be the place to see artists. This concept has created a theme-park atmosphere fed by tourist expectations.

"It's true that numerous artists can be found at Montmartre. The lucky ones rent the precious space on the Place du Tertre, but this in no way guarantees quality art.

"Worst of all is the proliferation of portrait artists who were not lucky enough to get an official space on the square — you literally don't stop for a half a second, or they're demanding money for the quick sketch of you they just whipped out. Their desperation to sell is quite depressing.

"While I was in El Paso, I read an article saying the Montmartre is a must, it's so Parisian. That's one of the myths about Paris which is quite untrue.

"As a picturesque village with windmills and vineyards just outside Paris, Montmartre became a favorite location for painters in the 19th century. Between 1860 and 1900, the names of Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, Van Gogh and Manet became associated with the area primarily because rent and food were cheap, and there was a wealth of models, dancers and prostitutes (who knows which came first).

"Truly, Montmartre was the Paris art center during this period, but just after the turn of the century, developers discovered the region and most of the serious painters grew fed up and moved to the Montparnasse area."

The Louvre

"Over the years, tourists have been both a blessing and a bane for Paris. Art Buchwald wrote a wonderful column on 'The Breaking of the Six Minute Louvre Record,' and I'm afraid that too many visitors come there with the attitude they can see it all in an hour.

"Seeing the Mona Lisa and two other ladies of renown, 'The Venus de Milo' and 'The Victory of Samothrace,' seems to be the major concern of these 'consumers of culture,' and they literally miss the thousands of other art treasures (3,700 paintings, 1,600 sculptures, and 8,200 other objects d'art) housed at the Louvre.

"One group of Americans toured the museum for two hours, and upon finding that the area housing the Mona Lisa was closed, demanded their money back.

"However, tourism is not all negative. Because of the continued interest in the city, the general architectural look of Paris has not changed that much since the late 1880s."