



Emilie Rhys. Photo by Sophie Germer

## ARTFUL DUET: Emilie Rhys, Noel Rockmore Exhibit At Jazz Museum

DECEMBER 26, 2019 by: JOHN WIRT

Despite not growing up with her portrait-painter father, Emilie Rhys is a third-generation artist. Following in famous New Orleans artist Noel Rockmore's footsteps, Rhys specializes in depicting New Orleans musicians. In her serene French Quarter studio, she paints portraits on canvas and smaller images on copper plates. At music venues, Rhys spontaneously draws pen-and-ink representations of musicians in performance. She achieves remarkably accurate likenesses in both mediums.

In January, the works of father and daughter will be exhibited together in a museum setting for the first time. *New Orleans Music Observed: The Art of Noel Rockmore and Emilie Rhys* opens January 30 at the New Orleans Jazz Museum. The exhibit pairs portraits by Rhys with Rockmore: works gathered from private collections, the Jazz Museum, Ogden Museum of Southern Art and the Historic New Orleans Collection.

Rockmore moved to New Orleans from New York City in 1959. He's locally renowned for his hundreds of portraits of Preservation Hall jazz musicians. Rhys moved to New Orleans in January 2012 from Santa Fe, New Mexico. During an exploratory visit to the city three months before the move, she instinctively went to Preservation Hall. While Rockmore's images of the hall's musicians looked down upon her from the venue walls, Rhys drew the evening's performers. "It felt intrusive, potentially distracting to pull out a sketch pad and start drawing," she remembered. "But I will do anything for art. Even if I have to put myself out there in a way that's uncomfortable, I will do it if the art needs it."

Rhys' studio paintings and the drawings she does at music venues are two different worlds of portraiture. The oil paintings can take years to complete. She does drawings in the moment, during the excitement of performance.

In the intimacy of her studio, Rhys said, "We talk a lot. And I give them my iPod and let them choose the music. I'm building a library of local music. Charlie Gabriel always picks Allen Toussaint. And the reason why is that, at the end of Allen's life, he toured with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. Charlie said he and Allen got very close and, when they were on stage, Charlie was in awe every time Allen played."

Rhys' pen-and-ink renderings of musicians on stage capture the immediacy of improvisation. "I see it as the music being transmitted onto the page," she said.

*New Orleans Music Observed: The Art of Noel Rockmore and Emilie Rhys* opens with a free reception at 6 p.m. January 30 at the New Orleans Jazz Museum, 400 Esplanade Avenue. Rhys' work is available at Scene by Rhys Fine Art, 708 Toulouse Street (10 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursday through Monday) and [scenebyrhys.com](http://scenebyrhys.com).