

Bidens' new home a gallery for Delaware art

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

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Delawarean Edward Loper, Sr.'s oil painting of a woods scene, "Alapocas Run," graces the living room, along with Frank Trefny's "Tree Peony Still Life."

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FULL TEXT

By NICOLE GAUDIANO

WASHINGTON - Inside the grand foyer of the vice president's residence here are two large landscape paintings by Wilmington artist Mary Page Evans and a 1945 oil painting by N.C. Wyeth, called "Lincoln Delivering His Second Inaugural Address."

Against walls painted dark blue, two Andrew Newell Wyeth paintings hang in the formal dining room where Vice President Joe Biden has hosted the presidents of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

A portrait of President John F. Kennedy by Jaymie Wyeth, born in Wilmington, hangs above the fireplace in the dark green wall-papered library.

If there is a theme to the artwork adorning the house where Biden lives now, that theme is his home state.

"We wanted initially to show off the great art and artists from the state of Delaware," Biden told about 100 guests crammed into his foyer during an arts reception that he and his wife, Jill, held Thursday night. "So many of you have made such contributions to the home."

Visual and performing artists from Washington and Delaware, leaders in the arts and museum communities, and members of Congress and the Obama administration attended the event, one of many the Bidens have held at their home since January.

The group applauded loudly when Biden noted that some of them had traveled from Wilmington.

"Joe, on Amtrak!" one woman shouted.

And the crowd sang "Happy Birthday" to a smiling Biden, who turns 67 on Friday.

Guests included first lady Michelle Obama's mother, Marion Robinson, who Biden joked could have been his mother if she wasn't so young.

The Bidens held the reception to highlight the artwork on display throughout the first floor of the home. All of the pieces are on loan, including some from private collections and the National Gallery of Art

Jill Biden told the group that she and the vice president, along with President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama "believe passionately in the power of art."

"And we've tried this past year to be your partners in furthering its reach," she said.

Mary Page Evans, who lives down the street from the Bidens' home back in Greenville, said she thought her landscape, "Large Sussex," would be a good fit for the residence. The painting, depicting fields just off Route 23 in Sussex County, is in the foyer, along with one of her Virginia landscapes.

"I think they found a good home," she said of her paintings.

Biden made a hobby of designing his Greenville home. But he's enjoying his accommodations at No. 1 Observatory

Circle, where he's spent nine months.

"I've always voted for public housing dollars," he joked during the gathering. "I never knew it was going to be this good."

Biden called the house "a loaner," but he and his wife have added personal touches.

Two pumpkins stood sentry at the front door as a reporter was guided through the first floor for an exclusive tour Thursday afternoon. Family photos topped a piano that Biden's grandchildren like to play in the foyer. The frame on a photo of Jill Biden dancing with her husband is inscribed, "To Mom, you make Christmas," from her three children.

Similar family photos are placed throughout the first floor, including some showing the Bidens celebrating in Chicago on election night. A photo above a television set in the library shows the Bidens' son, Beau Biden, who served with the National Guard in Iraq, standing in uniform with President Barack Obama.

Obama signed the photo, "To Beau, We are so proud of you!"

During the tour, a new family member, the Bidens' German Shepherd, "Champ," walked halfway down the steps in the middle of the foyer and slumped down on the landing as a staff member pointed out the new paintings. Later, Champ relaxed on the front porch as guests walked in and out of the home.

From still-lives and portraits to landscapes and beach scenes, the Bidens chose their pieces from catalogs and based on suggestions from artists or museums, including the Brandywine River Museum.

Showcasing Delaware artists was a "priority and a natural direction" for the Bidens, said Jill Biden's press secretary, Courtney O'Donnell.

The home contains more than 20 pieces by Delaware artists.

A pastel of Delaware's Rockford Park, by artist Laura McMillan, hangs in the solarium. Delawarean Laura Hickman's pastels of Bethany Beach homes hang in the back hallway.

Delawarean Edward Loper, Sr.'s oil painting of a woods scene, "Alapocas Run," graces the living room, along with Frank Trefny's "Tree Peony Still Life."

In the library and back hallway are two sculptures, one of a boy and one of a girl, by Delawarean Charles Parks. Jaymie Wyeth's painting of the vice presidential residence hangs in the back hallway.

More paintings by Delawarean artists, including N.C. Wyeth, Carol Balick and Frank Trefny, hang on the second floor. The house also contains paintings by Gilbert Stuart and John Singer Sargent, and sculptures by T. Remington Davis.

The Biden exhibit also included works by other budding young artists, namely the Biden's grandchildren and children of staffers.

Nine-year-old Maisy Biden's flying helicopter carries a man by a tether over water. And 14-year-old Naomi Biden's "Two Brothers" portrays two bears in the woods with the names of her father and uncle, Hunter Biden and Beau Biden, written in a heart on a tree.

Jill Biden said the masterpieces in the home don't compare to the children's art, but she "might be a little biased." "Our kids were just so proud to display it," she said. "I'm just really proud of them."

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Contact Nicole Gaudiano at [ngaudiano\(AT\)gannett.com](mailto:ngaudiano(AT)gannett.com).

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