

MORGAN LEHMAN

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A Resilient Blythe Danner Happily Takes Things in Stride

By **RUTH LA FERLA** MAY 15, 2015



Devin Yalkin for The New York Times

Blythe Danner was peering intently the other week at the work of her friend Kim McCarty, whose vaporous watercolors were about to go on view at the Morgan Lehman gallery in Chelsea.

She was especially partial to images cached at the gallery's rear, some with irises and leafy vines edging past their prime.

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“There’s a sensuality and a mysteriousness and complexity about these that intrigues me,” Ms. Danner said. “They give me great solace.”

Not that she seemed to need it. Vibrant in a persimmon silk blouse, jeans and dove gray cashmere coat, Ms. Danner was awaiting the release of her latest film, “I’ll See You in My Dreams,” which opened Friday. She was anything but dour.

But her performance as Carol, a widow facing the specter of mortality, tells a different story. The youthful director Brett Haley “cut away a lot of sentiment,” she said. “He kind of understood the difficult journey of going into old age, I’m not sure how.”

At 72, Ms. Danner herself can relate, resilient but just fragile enough to play a woman facing down time’s ravages. “We can’t dim the light, can we?” she murmured, half teasing, as a photographer set up his gear, her plea followed by self-deprecating, barely audible aside: “Oooh, I feel a bit like Blanche DuBois.”

Aging has its upside: “The emotion in the script was really easy to call forth. Just having lived for this many years, you’ve experienced everything.” She paused. “Of course, there’ve been plenty of losses.”

At the time of this interview, her children, the director Jake Paltrow and (for those just in from some distant galaxy) her daughter, Gwyneth, had not yet seen the film. “I keep putting off having them see it because it’s sort of close to home, I guess,” Ms. Danner said. She was referring, obliquely, to her husband, the producer and director Bruce Paltrow, who died at 58 in 2002.

Brightening, she rose to more closely examine Ms. McCarty’s paintings. Some were romantic in misty tones of gray, pink and mauve; others, especially a life size portrait of the artist’s daughter, exuded a perceptibly kinky air. “We brought several pieces, mostly of orchids and leaves, when Bruce was alive,” Ms. Danner said. “They hang as a triptych in my house.”

The actress, who may be familiar to home viewers from her commercials for Prolia, an osteoporosis medication (“Break a leg?” not likely), has spent much of her own time away from home, rehearsing for a string of parts. Well and good, because, as she said, “Women our age are always hungry for strong roles.”

Among those to have come her way lately, the part of Ruth Madoff in a coming ABC mini-series, opposite Richard Dreyfuss as the infamous Ponzi schemer. It’s a gritty role, for sure, but then she’s never imagined herself a beacon of glamour. “I would never call myself a movie star,” she said. “I was never the type.”

“It’s the cheekbones,” she added. “My daughter has them. To be a movie star you have to have them.”

To say nothing of acquiring a rhinoceros hide. Ms. Paltrow, she knows, has come in for her share of barbs for everything from her perceived advocacy of the pampered life on

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her Goop website, to her ill-advised candor on the breakup of her marriage to the singer Chris Martin.

Among actors, Ms. Danner implied, hostility comes with the turf. “I’ve often warned Gwyneth,” Ms. Danner said. “This is a brutal business.”

Yet like her latest character, she seems herself to take things in stride. As the film progresses, Carol puffs on a hookah, inhaling pungent draughts of medical marijuana with her gal pals at the local senior center — and, on an impromptu visit to a karaoke bar, she delivers a poignant full-throated rendition of “Cry Me a River.”

The scene was a natural. “Early on I wanted to be a jazz singer,” Ms. Danner said.

Who’s to say she won’t revisit that long-ago ambition?

She exhaled languorously. “What I like about getting older is being liberated,” she said. True, the moment’s uncertain. “But we carry on.”