



Kay Stratman creates her watercolor painting with a brush in one hand and a hair dryer in the other Saturday during the QuickDraw in Town Square. Stratman said her watercolor paintings usually take longer to dry, so she used the dryer to make sure the piece would be finished in the one-hour time limit.

# Prompt painter

Watercolorist races against hourglass to complete piece for auction.

By Kelsey Dayton

**T**he leaves were already cut, the paints mixed hours before, the idea already vivid in her mind.

During the Fall Arts Festival QuickDraw, artists are given only an hour to create a piece to be auctioned off that same day. But when Kay Stratman began her watercolor work Saturday in Town Square, hours of labor for her piece were already behind her.

In its 14th year, the QuickDraw attracts artist representing a variety of media – from painting to sculpture – with the oil painters being the predominant entrants, said Maureen Murphy, events manager with the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce.

Watercolor is particularly challenging to do in an hour. The paint must dry for Stratman to create various layers. And it must be totally dry before it's framed and sent to the auction, which happens less than half an hour after the event ends.

In her second QuickDraw, Stratman added a hair dryer and extension cord to her supplies.

Weeks before the event, Stratman started practicing, familiarizing herself with the aspen leaves she wanted to paint lying on water. The small pieces she

Painted each took more than an hour. Her piece for the QuickDraw was larger.

She laid out her brushes.

Would she be able to finish? she wondered aloud.

Weather can change everything. Last year, friends shielded Stratman's work with umbrellas. This year, the sun beat down, at times blocked by a friend's hat.

At the announcement of the start, Stratman began to trace the paper leaves she brought, then outlined the drawings with water, to keep the inside of the leaves dry as blue paint flooded the background.

Stratman had two challenges: to keep certain areas dry and others wet.

Crowds gathered.

"So distinctive and different," a woman murmured.

Normally Stratman's work happens spontaneously, the colors blending in an almost impressionistic style.

Stratman uses a traditional Asian brush stroke, called sumi-e, an art form she has focused on for about a decade, her husband, Paul Hansen, explained to those watching.

Her specific style is called p'o mo, or splash ink, done on a paper board covered with gold metallic and then rice paper. It's risky for a QuickDraw.

"It either works or it doesn't,"



Stratman uses real and plastic leaves to create and define shapes and textures on her watercolor painting during the QuickDraw.

Hansen said.

"She's probably the most likely one here to throw it away and not enter it," he said.

The paint slipped around on the board, blue paint bleeding into a leaf.

"That's OK, I let that happen," Stratman said.

"When that happens, it's like water flowing over leaves."

The faster Stratman paints, the more impressionistic the painting becomes, she said. In the timed competition, blues and greens melted around gold, oranges and reds, forming leaves on water.

"It doesn't always do this, but I kind of like how the blue and yellow are blending together," she said.

Midway through the contest, Stratman used the hair dryer to move the paint on the board.

She paused to pick up aspen leaves from the ground, better than some she brought from

home. She painted an iridescent gold on the back and used a leaf as a stamp, pressing it into the board.

"Placement is key," she said. "It doesn't look planned, but it is."

She called the final watercolor *September Reflections*, a piece about capturing the beauty of fall.

"I think there are places over the world for art that don't get the same comment, but frankly like things that are pretty," she said.

There were a few minutes when Stratman put down her brush.

Stratman held the paintbrush, taking the last few moments to contemplate her work, before rushing over to Center Street Gallery to put it behind the glass frame she had waiting.

It always takes a minute to figure the painting out, she said. And then, it's gone, off to the auction block and sold.