

FEATURED ARTIST: KELLY SHEEHAN

Kelly Sheehan is the AFFPS Featured Artist for January, 2014. Patrick Dennis interviewed her for this article.

Q: Rather than being derivative, you seem to have taken a very famous form of artwork and made it fresh. What influenced you to produce work reminiscent of Henri Matisse?

A: Since childhood I've been intrigued by cutouts. My family frequently went to National gallery when I was a child and with guests from out of town. I was drawn to the colors, size, and pieces. I got lost in the art and ways he produced work known as "painting with scissors." In college I dabbled in fine art but chose graphic design for my vocation. After marriage and children I decided to focus on what I love which is to paint. The similarities are easy to see: in graphic design I used cutout art, moving images around on an art board (software) to create a finished piece for the client. I get a similar feeling by taking physical pieces of art cut outs, then moving them around on a physical canvas. In a file, you save it. Now, my version of saving a file is to glue it down on canvas.

Q: How do you arrive at subjects you choose?

A: It all depends on my mood, like any artist I suppose. But there are two ways in which I begin. The first is a feeling of wanderlust, of places I want to see; I paint wherever I want to be. The concept of painting those places take me there. I embrace those feelings. For example, when painting "Senorita," I picked a palette of colors reflecting my feelings and desire to 'be there.' The other way is a more definite way of having a picture in mind (like the cat in the window or the goldfish bowl). For those I am in more of a textile mood (carpet on floor, chair in background assembled with pieces). Either way I get lost in the feeling. It just happens. After years of designing for someone else to meet their expectations, I now just let it go where it's going. But I do start out with an idea and a picture in my head.

Q: Briefly describe your technique.

A: I start with an idea (landscape or subject) and the colors I want to use. I use gouache paint exclusively for the matte finish the paint creates. I take a piece of watercolor paper and paint it with gouache in five or six colors (one color per sheet). I use whatever color comes to mind. Then I take a white board, scraps from past efforts and start moving them around. I love the element of



surprise. Once I have something I like, I start adhering the pieces to a background. I step back to look at the progress until it tells me what to do next.

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Gouache is a creamy type of paint. I used it in art school and when I started doing my own art again as an adult, I went right back to it for the colors and texture. Gouache makes a more opaque color and hides brushstrokes but still makes it clear that I'm not using construction paper!



Q: We have not seen anyone doing this type of art in a long time but it seems like the time is right to show it now. Do you realize you are unique?

A: I'm not trying to be unique. I just do what I do and not think about trends. I have made some pottery and painted with oils in the past but I always come back to assembling materials which is what speaks to me. It seems to be what I'm good at. I do look at other artists and learn from them, but I realize this is what I should be doing. When I Google this type of artwork it, I do see that there are very few people doing what I do but whether that is good or bad is not important.

Q: Since you are in a very unique category of art, it will be curious to see how the public responds to your work. What are your goals and how you might fit in to the art world?

A: I don't have any big goals yet. I'm taking baby steps. I'm learning about art shows and how to do them as well as getting lots of inspiring feedback from other artists. Recently a friend of mine said my art gave her a happy, peaceful feeling. That appeals to me. My long term goal is to having that type of a lasting effect. Only recently did I bring my art out to show in public. I'm taking it slow and absorbing the effect it has on people. I feel like a door is opening up for me and I'm excited about it.

Q: Any personal comments?

A: First, I'm married and have four kids. I have a great family. They are supportive and encouraging, but I know they're happy when I finish a painting and clean up. Doing cutouts is messy work! Second, the influence of my extended family has been extraordinary. My mother's mother was a professional artist (oils), and taught at Appalachian State college. My father's side of the family has a history of quilters. My siblings have many quilts we've inherited as a result and we treasure them. One of my fondest memories is from age 12, when my mother (a great seamstress) and grandmother and I made a quilt together. Cutting, piecing and putting them together was very satisfying. All of that, the paintings and quilts tell a story and it inspires me to tell my own story through my art.

To learn more about Kelly Sheehan's art, visit her website: www.kellyayerssheehan.com

Kelly Sheehan art is on display at the Decatur Market & Gallery: www.decaturgallery.com