

Interview with an Artist

Jeannie McGuire



Proud
20 x 22

When I was a child, I spent hours pouring over old family albums and imagining what the lives were like of the people pictured there. As I grew up, I found myself collecting vintage photographs, from family and friends, and buying them at garage sales and from antique stores. It's a type of imagery that stirs my imagination and ties me to many histories. Imagine my delight when I discovered the breath taking watercolors of Jeannie McGuire! Marrying two of my passions: old photographs and watercolors. Her work has been described as a brilliant combination of emotion, movement, natural design, and sheer artistry. I couldn't agree more and I cannot say enough about how much I love her work. Thank you Jeannie, for this interview and for the exciting work.

To introduce you to our readers, please tell me a little bit about your background, where you studied, and about some of your favorite art accomplishments.

Pittsburgh Pennsylvania is my home. I attended The Art Institute of Pittsburgh for Commercial Graphic Design and later for photography. Opting for the less glamorous end of the art field, at the time I could not imagine how one would make a living doing fine art; who would hire, and to do what? Thankfully my studies included some fine art and figure drawing was my favorite class. I spent the first 16 years of my career in the design field and fazed it out in 1990 to focus on fine art.

I built my career from that point exclusively drawing and painting faces and figures, creating works of art of people.

I've exhibited work and received awards regionally for many years. My exposure widened with an award in the California Watercolor Association exhibition at the Presidio in 2010. A feature article in *Watercolor Artist Magazine* came thereafter, providing my first introduction to the national art and workshop community.

A year later the honor of winning the American Watercolor Society's 144th Gold Medal of Honor in 2011 was more than I ever imagined. Along with the international notoriety of the award came the unexpected surprise of additional magazine features, including: The Artist's magazine, *American Artist Watercolor* and *l'Art de l'Aquarelle*. Most recent is a beautiful new French/English publication, *Le grand livre de l'aquarelle / The complete book of watercolour* by Janine Gallizia, released December 2012.

I credit the magazine features for the subsequent workshop invitations I receive from artists and art organizations across the country. The attendees, with their many questions and varied experiences, have taught me much about teaching. It's a win for both of us; I share how, what and why I paint, encourage them to find their voice, their style, their passion, and in turn I become a better artist myself.

Why did you start painting?

I have always had a desire to create drawings and paintings of people but mainly a desire to invoke a feeling, a moment, a persona.

The more I paint the more intuitive my process becomes. With this comes challenges, that at times seem impossible to overcome, of course until the painting is done!

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Tell us a little bit about your works in progress, your working style, subject-matter preferences, and how these link up or are developed from what you have done in the past.

Workshop demos are overflowing on my desk, so I have many works in progress! I tell my students that I'm a working artist, that the demos are paintings I'm doing for my work, be it an exhibition, commission, or my own personal series. Lucky for them they see what is most current in my art.

I often work in series, wanting to be connected to the subject or genre for a while to spur new thought and experimentation. Referencing old photos and snap shots has been a passion for years, enabling me to delve into history, clothing, human character. Since I often do not know the people I'm painting I feel liberated to create what could be their story. I also will make up ideas for paintings and shoot my own photos to reference or use my figure sketches from open studios.

Design and composition are a constant through out all the phases of my work; from the initial thought, paper size, cropping, contrast and so on in both the drawing and painting phases. The process is somewhat intuitive and a pointed question from a student gave me pause, as many of their questions do.... what am I

thinking, why did you make that mark or decide to do that? I had never said out load what I intuitively do in my head... of how the viewer's eye will move around the painting, how the eye subconsciously travels from the main focal point, following connected directional lines, shapes, contrast etc. which guide the eye back to the main focus.

For example, in *Iron*, my goal is for the viewer to see the strength and balance of this fellow, to sense that he just now crouched down to make direct eye contact with us. We instinctively focus on his eyes. With one eye bathed in light and the other simply rimmed in light, the effect makes our eye jump back and forth as we take in this new person.

The tilt of his shoulders and the angle of his arms, draw our gaze to his weight bearing leg. The choice of the dark contrast of the supporting leg is a subtle way of emphasizing the engaged muscles in juxtaposition of the relaxed muscles. His elbows and knees point to the fellows on either side of him.

These fellows may not be quickly identifiable but after pondering a bit one might see that they are wearing work clothes. My reference for *Iron* is an anonymous photo purchased at a flea market. I am guessing that the group of co-workers are machinists from the 1930 to 1950's.

I'm working on an extensive series of these men.



Lena
9 x 9



Iron
23 x 22

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Pride
20 x 22

Which artists or art movements inspire/influence you?

The impressionists without a doubt. Degas is a particular favorite.

What is your process? When do you paint/how do you structure your time?

I prefer to have a large block of time for painting which is extremely difficult to arrange as business efforts take the forefront on a daily basis. My 3rd floor studio is set up for my art needs: drafting table and easels for art creating, space for mat cutting and frame assembly, computer, scanner and printer space.

A strong composition and drawing are key to the bones or structure of the painting. I may begin to get an idea of how I want to paint while in this stage, or not. The start of the painting is always the easiest and most spontaneous for me. I'll paint till I have a good overall feeling about the painting's direction, deciding to stop when I don't know what to do next.

The middle phase is where the hard decisions come. My experience tells me to keep experimenting because that is how new and unexpected developments happen. This can be risky and daunting and surely



Lexington 6
23 x 30



Miami Demo

unpredictable. I get myself into plenty of jams where areas appear ruined beyond repair. At times a positive outcome will come quickly but many times there is much

anguish, applying pigment, taking it away, over and over until I finally do something different that will be just right... exhausting.

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Navigating
22 x 30
(Andrew Carnegie and wife Louise)



*Machinist
Demo*

How long does it take to complete a work of art?

I'll either work on one painting exclusively or have several in the mix. All depends on the project and deadline. Paintings could take two to four weeks for completion, depending.



*Machinist
Demo*

How do you define success?

Success in a painting is defined by its effect. When it becomes intriguing, draws attention from afar, invokes a feeling, a sense, a memory, a desire to ponder the persona.

Are you involved with any art societies?

I'm a long time member of the Pittsburgh Watercolor Society and the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh and a new signature member of the American Watercolor Society. For the last few years I have actively collaborated with 3 other Pittsburgh artists, pursuing exhibit opportunities and Art Immersion workshops.

Is your work viewable in any current or upcoming shows?

Yes! You can see my work at:

Mansions on Fifth Hotel
Galerie Werner
5105 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15232

Signature American Watercolor
Exhibition
Fallbrook Art Center
February 2-March 17, 2013
103 South Main
Fallbrook, CA 92028

La Biennale Internationale d'Aquarelle
Center d'Art Sebastien
Opening Reception April 27, 2013
April 28 - June 16, 2013
Saint-Cyr sur Mer, France
*Collection of works by six
international artists*

Do you offer workshops?

I offer figurative design workshops, depicting figures and faces using watercolor in a non-traditional way. Currently the following workshops are scheduled but more are in the works, maybe even in the Northwest! Please visit my website for more information.

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Workshops

March 11 - 14, 2013
San Diego Watercolor Society
San Diego, CA | (619) 876-4550

April 10 - 12, 2013
April 13, 2013
Arizona Watercolor Association
Phoenix, AZ | (602) 277-0167

May 7 - 10, 2013
Sierra Watercolor Society
Reno, NV | (775) 852-1583

May 14 - 16, 2013
Folsom Arts Association
Folsom, CA | (916) 608-9153

June 10 - 13, 2013
Mansions on Fifth
Art Immersion Retreat
Pittsburgh, PA | (1-800) 465-9550

October 7 - 11, 2013
Potomac Valley Watercolorists
Arlington, VA

2014
January 8 - 10, 2014
Palm Beach Watercolor Society
Delray Beach, FL

March 24 - 28, 2014
Cuyahoga Valley Art Center
Cuyahoga Falls, OH | (330) 928-8092

2015
January 13 - 16, 2015
Southern Arizona Watercolor Guild
Tucson, AZ

February 16 - 20, 2015
Gold Coast Watercolor Society
Fort Lauderdale, FL | (954) 560-8665



Heavy Load
23 x 30



Cloe
9 x 9

*Interview with Jeannie McGuire
by Charlene Collins Freeman
Editor, Hot Press*

<http://www.jeanniemcguire.com>

Jeannie McGuire, a Pittsburgh-based watercolor artist, invokes individual interpretation through her artwork, using a free application of paint and stylistic forms of expression, communicating stories and feelings such as in her painting "Kenneth," the American Watercolor Society's

144th Gold Medal of Honor selection.

Impressionistic in nature with an identifiable subject, her strong, figurative approaches are unique.

Her works have been displayed and awarded on an International level and represented in numerous art magazines.

McGuire further dedicates herself to her craft by instructing figurative design watercolor workshops in an effort to encourage fellow artists.