

Imagination and memory mingle in 'Turning the Page' exhibition

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Illustrator Elizabeth Lampman Davis rejoices in the great outdoors. Her imagination runs wild in wide open spaces, on mountainous trails and deep in magical woods. She recalls her childhood backyard and how a boxwood bush was transformed into a perfectly cozy fort for her 5-year-old self. Her grandparents' plush area rug provided roads for her to drive tiny cars to along its designs.

When Lampman Davis sketches out ideas for children's books, this imagination serves her well. A wheelbarrow no longer only hauls yard trash but can also blast off like a spaceship or dive underwater like a submarine. Inspiration comes from her two children and their energetic spirits as well as memories from her own childhood.



Lampman Davis

"It was back in the days when kids would be pushed out of the front door and parents would say to come back when it starts getting dark for dinner," says Lampman Davis. "You have this wonderful freedom of exploring in the woods by yourself, or with a sibling or friend. I loved building forts in the woods, skipping rocks and fishing. It makes me happy to think about, which makes me want to create something that reflects that kind of joy."

Lampman Davis' solo exhibition at the Artport Gallery this spring reflects not only that joy, but something far greater. "Turning the Page," brings visibility to children who are often underrepresented in children's literature.

In her description of the exhibit, she quotes statistics that she finds discouraging — only 11.9% of main characters in children's books are African American, 8.7% are Asian, 5.3% are Latinx, 1% are Native American and 3.4% are differently-abled. As a mother of a mixed-race family, Lampman Davis strives to turn this narrative around with every brushstroke.

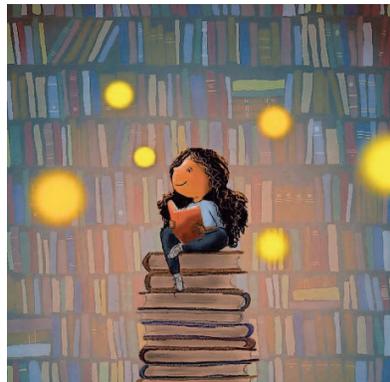
"When my kids wanted books read to them, I realized there wasn't much great quality children's literature that represented them," says Lampman Davis. "So I started drawing illustrations to make sure that more kids get to be seen."

A voracious reader, Lampman Davis always had rich images come to mind when taking in her favorite books. When she begins world-building for her own sketches, she will first imagine how a character might move through a scene. Her second and third re-imaginings are often what are left on the page.

The publishing process is arduous, but Lampman Davis says she learns something new with every draft. Digital art is still a fairly recent muscle she is flexing. Her grandmother, mother and aunt were all visual artists, so Lampman Davis feels their passion in various media has been passed down to her. While she started with pencil and paper, she has continued practicing her skills in graphic design, photography and digital art-making.

"The wonderful thing about digital work as

See DAVIS, Page 4C



Elizabeth Lampman Davis' favorite pieces came from moments when she finally felt she had captured the right colors or wielded a digital tool skillfully after much practice. ELIZABETH LAMPMAN DAVIS

Davis

Continued from Page 1C

opposed to working with paint is that you can change it after it's all done," says Lampman Davis. "I'll finish a piece completely and wonder if it could be dusk instead of bright sunny daylight. I like that digital allows me to do that."

Lampman Davis' moleskin notebooks are full of rough drafts and sketches. Turning to her computer is the next step. She will often use photos for reference to figure out the intricacies of bodily anatomy or scenery. Lampman Davis looks up to illustrators like Vashti Harrison, especially in her book "Sulwe," which she believes renders light, composition and color with undeniable mastery.

Artistic breakthroughs on certain pieces mark milestones. Her favorite pieces come from moments where she finally felt she had captured the right colors or wielded a digital tool after much practice. Lampman Davis wishes her early journey had been less marked by perfectionism and fear, and highly recommends copying the masters as a daily practice to improve drawing skills.

"Sharing my work online has helped me to grow because you have to mess up publicly," adds Lampman Davis. "You force yourself to learn faster and prac-



tice deeper because you don't want to put bad work out there. I look back at my early Instagram days and I think it's embarrassing, but I want to leave it so people know no one starts as a master. I'm

still learning and have so much still to grow, which I'm excited about."

Many of Lampman Davis' images, which can be viewed at the Artport Gallery or in COCA's online gallery, are

"Turning the Page," Elizabeth Lampman Davis' solo exhibition at the Artport Gallery takes inspiration from nature and diversity.

ELIZABETH LAMPMAN DAVIS

If you go

What: Turning the Page: Inclusive Illustrations by Elizabeth Lampman Davis

When: Daily 8 a.m.-11:30 p.m.

Where: The Artport Gallery, 3300 Capital Circle SW

Contact: For more information, call 850-224-2500 or visit COCA's online gallery at <http://cocaonline.gallery.zenfolio.com/>.

pulled directly from her real life. A silhouette of a family hiking in an autumnal wood is part imagination, part memory from a family outing. In another illustration, two children dance and shout in brightly colored bathing suits with equally as dazzling umbrellas in the pouring rain.

"That was part of my childhood growing up in south Florida and having these operatic experiences outside in the afternoon rain," laughs Lampman Davis.

Her biggest hope is that the exhibit will bring a moment of nostalgic reprieve from the day-to-day stressors of living during these unprecedented times. She wants families to not only forget their woes for a while but embrace fond memories. Most importantly, she wants the children who see these characters to also see their own potential to achieve anything.

"Writing and illustrating for children is a huge responsibility because you become part of who they are and who they become," says Lampman Davis. "I could have a chance to have a little kid feel like they could be the hero of the day. And what life choices might they make if they feel that way?"

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).