

'Courage' and 'Hope' guide Brush Strokes artist

Amanda Sieradzki
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Jennifer Lange is leading the Tallahassee Watercolor Society's annual Brush Strokes exhibition for the third year in a row.

A long-time member, the watercolorist is also the mind and heart behind the Tallahassee Memorial Hospital (TMH) Rehab "COVID Heroes" painting project which has gifted portraits to countless essential workers during these uncertain times. Although the exhibit looks a little different than in past years, Lange is always up for a challenge.

"Brush Strokes survives!" exclaims Lange. The juried show is currently being hosted on COCA's digital gallery and will be available to view through Nov. 16. "The good news is that we, as a watercolor society and a community of people, are growing and adapting to a new 'normal.'"

While Lange admits it was "touch and go" for a while, she is pleased with the end result—an online exhibition which features 42 works from 24 local and regional artists.

"The virtual environment is enabling the art to reach more people than ever," said Lange. "[The artists] overcame the emotional and physical disruption in their lives that caused artistic paralysis in others. They created art that can be shared with others and evoke a spirit of resilience, creativity and adaptability. Their spirit inspires."

Lange is counted among those artists who continued to find solace in her palette and brushes during a quarantined summer. She remembers when she first began painting many years ago and would stare at the blank page worriedly.

Lange is grateful to mentors like Bart Frost who had encouraged her to just paint what she saw. She admires regional artists like Suzanna Winton for her mastery of color and skin tones, as well as British watercolorists like Jean Haines and Hazel Soan who can control and let the water flow over a page. Over time Lange's watercolor pieces have evolved from being purely representational to balancing realistic with abstract styles.

"I think it's easier to take a chance on a picture of an animal," says Lange, who enjoys painting portraiture. "But once you've painted a dog that's purple and



Jennifer Lange's Brush Strokes piece, "Hope" is of her dog, Jasper.

green enough times, I think you're willing to paint a person purple and green."

She will always decide on her colors before picking up a brush, then builds her palettes with pools of paint in every possible hue she could desire. Mostly, she works from photographs that she takes, and will sometimes merge images in editing programs to create composites.

For her piece titled "Courage" in this year's Brush Strokes exhibit, she took a photo of a tiger at the New Orleans Zoo and then cropped it to get into the details of his face and fur. Lange used salt to give the paint a fuzzy effect. In his eyes, she aimed to express the duality of fear and happiness.

"I think a lot of times the eyes tell you what the feeling is," says Lange, whose other Brush Strokes piece, "Hope" is of her dog, Jasper. "You can see it in his face what he is trying to say."

Before the pandemic, Lange would

travel once a week to the St. Mark's Wildlife Refuge with a group of friends to photograph and paint. Now, she mostly paints in her dining room. Lange prefers the quiet and keeps her work area tidy, small and confined.

She misses visiting the Tallahassee Senior Center and traveling to her teacher, Winten's house in Thomasville to paint once a week. Now, many of her groups will get on a Zoom call to paint in one another's presence, sharing either silence or the news of the day.

"Everyone sits in their own dining room or studio and we chat," says Lange. "Part of the fun of painting as a group is to share your ideas and your technique, but you also get to talk about what's going on in your life."

Lange's main outings around town are still limited, but she especially enjoys the chance to deliver her mini portraits to the rehab center. She was proud with how quickly the idea grew and how



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If you go

What: 2020 Annual Brush Strokes Exhibition

When: Sept. 16-Nov. 16

Where: COCA's online gallery

Contact: To see the online exhibit please visit, <https://cocaonlinegallery.zenfolio.com/>. For more information on the Tallahassee Watercolor Society please visit <https://tallahassee-watercolorssociety.org>.

other artists began to paint essential workers as a way to capture this time in history.

Looking ahead at the remainder of 2020, she feels similar to the titles of her paintings — full of hope and courage. She would like to see more diversity of artistic style and membership within the watercolor society. Lange hopes the Brush Strokes exhibition will continue to inspire artists of varying backgrounds to join in the conversation.

"Art does say something," says Lange. "It can be small, quiet and personal. Other times it is big and bold. Either way, it can ask the viewer to look beyond, to see someone else's 'normal,' to reevaluate positions or spur discussion to advance an agenda or movement. I see more of that happening in 2020 than I have in a while."

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).