

# My Artistic Development

By Laurie E. Herrman Myers

My family has played an important part in my artistic development. My creative, artistic success and endeavors have been inspired and influenced by my family as well as friends. The primary influence of my artistic development in public school was little to none. I had three art teachers between kindergarten and my senior year. My elementary art teacher disposed of our work if it didn't match her example. I worked hard to learn how to copy—so I could please her and save myself from being embarrassed. I was painfully shy until I was in high school. The middle school art teacher threw supplies at students if they weren't returned to the designated spot. I learned how to clean really well that year. My high school art teacher was a shy, but nice man. He taught me the basics of perspective, drawing, and painting. His curriculum centered on copying works of art and photographs. It was not until I entered college that I began to explore art more fully.



*The picture above is of me creating with play dough. I had read Curious George and figured out how to make paper boats and hats that day as well. I have taken off my uncomfortable dress after church and was enjoying a relaxing Sunday afternoon in our cozy family room.*



My earliest memories of any sort of art would have to be the musical talents of my mother, Cassandra. She still has the most beautiful voice of anyone I have ever heard. To add to her musical gifts, she is a very talented pianist. For as far back as I can remember my mother played the piano. She taught me the basics but also sent me to another piano teacher to ensure I had the best. One of the few things that helped me relax and go to sleep was listening to my mom play Claire de Lune in the evening. To this day, it is my favorite piece for her to play. Watching her is as beautiful as listening to her. She gracefully moves her hands and

fingers, yet acquires her entire body into the performance. I actually feel and see the music coming from her entire being. With my mother, I also went to the town chamber singers as well as her church choir rehearsals and performances. It was never anything I questioned or disliked. I just went and was part of experiencing a large variety of music. I believe the experiences and opportunities my mother exposed me to have given me an appreciation for all genres of music.



My grandmother, Mimi Ida, was also very talented. However, her talent was in the area of visual and applied arts. She was always making something and included me, along with my three cousins, on her newest creation.

Macramé, painting murals and cabinets, creating puppets, and spending time at Ona's Ceramics shop still bring back fond memories of growing up. The smell of a kiln firing, wet clay, and glazes from my own classroom still spark memories of Saturdays at Ona's. With Mimi Ida, I was surrounded by opportunities to construct or create something. If we weren't creating art, we were in the yard hunting for four-leaf clovers and flowers or playing funny hand-games. Mimi Ida wasn't one for cooking or



*Self-Portrait*, 2009. Unaltered digital photograph, 11" x 14"

doing laundry, but she sure

had an imagination and love for nature—which reminds me of the long Sunday afternoon car rides in the country.



*Tribute to Aunt Lettie*, 1994. Paper collage from old journals and acrylic paint, 2'x3'

Aunt Lettie was my great aunt who had a passion for writing and photography. I have spent hours and hours of my life reading her journals and examining her cameras, pictures, and slides. She modeled the importance of recording memories and beautiful shots of things she deemed important. One of her most unforgettable photographs was of her friend, Harry S. Truman, holding my father who was two at the time. The photograph was taken during one of Truman's campaign visits. I use Aunt Lettie's old



cameras to teach the history of photography to my students. My students enjoy playing with her cameras all year long—even when we aren't studying photography. My great aunt's spirit lives on in my classroom.

My grandmother passed away when I was six-years-old. This was a very troubling time for me, probably due to my age, but also because I was so close to her. I spent a great deal of time writing her letters and creating my art for her. I believe making things for my Mimi helped me deal with this loss. When I was a little older, I created art to deal with the passing of other



*Mimi*, 1974. Terra Cotta Clay, 2"x 2"

family members. This became a way to

express my feelings about each person. I hadn't really thought about it until now, but this creative expression has been like a gift to heal the loss. I have continued this practice and enjoy giving the artwork to the person most greatly affected.

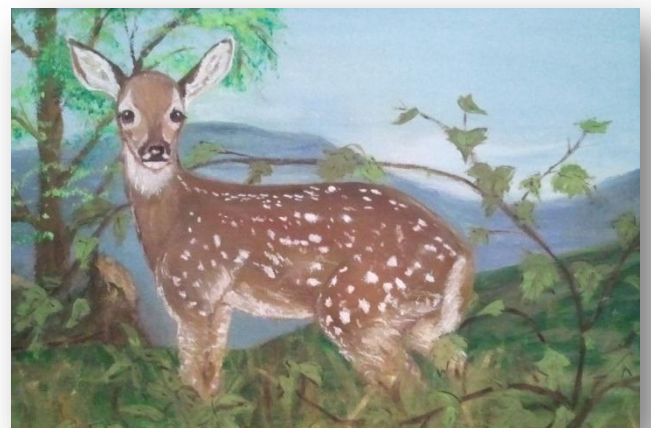


*Tribute to B.J. Myers*, 2006. Colored pencil, 20"x24"

When I was about 12, my mother asked me if I would like to take some private art lessons. I had taken many dance and twirling classes trying to mimic another of my mother's talents, but to her dismay—I was just too shy to excel. Louise Boone was the most positive person I had ever met. She was upbeat, complimentary, and constantly encouraging. Although I experienced oil painting from her, I have to credit her for the majority of my teaching philosophy; "Can't is a dirty four-letter word, you CAN do anything you put your mind to, and

always find something good about your work." Louise provided a friendly, caring, comfortable, positive, and safe environment in which to learn painting. I am very conscientious about providing the same environment for my students within my own classroom.

I am a product of the Rolla Public Schools. I am proud to say this, but sad to say the majority of



*Fawn*, 1979, Under the instruction of Louise Boone, Oil on canvas, 8"x13"

my experiences in visual art were elementary student, I was painfully “fallen through the cracks” had my my education. Mom had provided supplies. She didn’t care if I made a it up. I especially enjoyed drawing Woodstock as well as creating even hand stitched small pillows modeling my other grandmother; Etch-A-Sketch were also favorites.



less than positive. As an shy. I was one who could have mother not been so involved in me with all sorts of art mess, just as long as I cleaned Peanut’s Snoopy and things out of play-dough. I and clothes for my dolls, Mimi Hazel. Spirograph and But when it came to art at

school, I remember feeling sad that everyone had to make their artwork match. I could easily accomplish the task of matching the teacher’s example, but not everyone could. I recall feeling sad for those children who didn’t get their project hung up or even thrown away if it wasn’t “right.” I always did what was expected because I wanted to please my teacher and didn’t want to be reprimanded. The most positive memory of art in elementary school for me was receiving an award for reproducing the “best” black and white logo.



*Dolphin*, 1982, Rolla High School, Tempera Paint, 12”x14”

Moving on to middle school art was a bit crazy.

We only had art for one quarter and our teacher was very unpleasant. I don’t remember anything from that class but dodging flying art materials. It wasn’t the students throwing paintbrushes and paper—it was our teacher! If someone forgotten to clean something up, she would chuck it at us. I honestly recall being

nervous she would throw scissors at us. The interesting thing

is this very classroom is the one I teach in right now. I have been in this same building for 20 years. Six of those years have been in the classroom I feared as a seventh grader. The classroom furniture is basically the same, and the kiln-firing, glaze smell is certainly similar. I never dreamed I would be an art teacher. I definitely never had even a small thought that I might come back to Rolla Middle School to teach.

*Man’s Best Friend*, 1983. Rolla High School, Tempera Paint, 20”x24”





*Self-Portrait*, 1986, William Woods College, Fulton, Missouri. Overlapping negatives, 8"x10"

My experience in 7<sup>th</sup> grade art was so terrible; I did not take an art class in school again until I was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. My junior year in high school, Mr. Strebeck was an awkward individual who smelled odd and had strange quirks. However, he was positive and encouraging in a quiet kind of way. He moved around the classroom constantly; offering one on

one attention. Mr. Strebeck was present but also allowed us to be independent with space to work and create. The important

lessons I model from my high school art teacher is the importance of connecting with my students and at the same time allowing independence. Also in high school, I took my first drama class. Although I was still shy, John Woodfin was an amazing educator. He easily capitalized on the unique gifts of each individual. I became part of the set and make-up designers. Even though I never even auditioned for an acting part, I would dream about having the lead role and forgetting my lines every time!

Because of my lack of positive art education in public school, my artistic development was obviously stifled. I didn't see art as my gift. I started my undergraduate work in the area of journalism. I loved to write and it came easy to me. Through journalism, I was also able to quench my thirst and interest in photography. Eventually I decided I didn't want to be a journalist but my photography classes exposed me to the Fine Arts department at William Woods College. I fell in love with my art classes and admired all my art professors. They were positive, happy, and helpful and pushed me to unfold my hidden talents. While most students slept in the art appreciation and history classes, I couldn't get enough! I became very fascinated with Georgia O'Keeffe and her

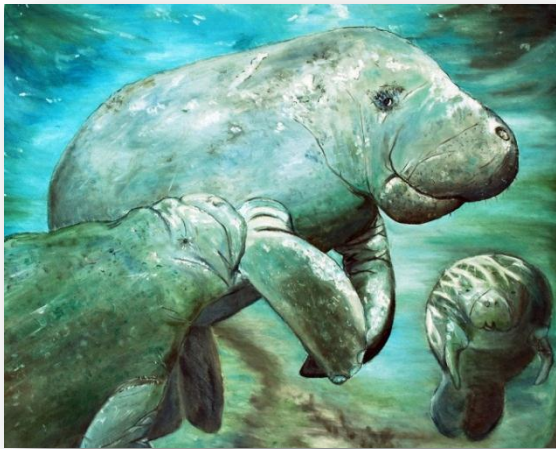


Left: *Bulging Cylinder*, 1987, William Woods College. Red earthenware clay, 6"x 4"

Below: *Bulb*, 1986. William Woods College, red earthenware clay, 4 1/2"x6"







*Manatees*, 1985, William Woods College.  
Acrylic on canvas, 3'x4'

work. Sadly, in 1986, her death became a controversial issue in the media as her lack of a will stirred many to pretend they were related to her in order to gain some of her estate. I remember thinking how terrible that was but also how cool! To live to be almost 100 and be able to work as an artist in a beautiful environment without worrying about the future could be wonderful. O'Keeffe's work influenced my painting *Seashell*. This was the first piece of art I

created without looking at a

picture. I think this was a big step for my progress.

I had a dream my junior year in college that I graduated with a degree in art. The only thing I could do with the degree in my dream was decorate cakes at the local bakery. I remember sitting on my grandfather's foot stool telling him about my dream. My aunt, who was a teacher, was there. Her advice was simple; learn all you can about your favorite subject and teach it. It just made sense. My love for kids and my passion for art—it was a perfect combination!



*Seashell*, 1985. William Woods College, Acrylic on canvas, 20"x 24"



*The Life of a Leaf*, 1988, William Woods College. Acrylic on canvas, 4' x 4'

Student teaching was rough. Carmen

McEwen, my cooperating teacher, was a stickler for details. I learned to be specific and precise, but I also learned to allow my student's individual creative expression. She was a veteran teacher who sponsored many art education student teachers. I am proud to say I was one of the few who earned an A under Mrs. McEwen's watchful eye. My first year of teaching was much easier than student teaching! My first teaching stint was for four years in the small community of Licking,

Missouri. Ellen Reynolds taught art kindergarten

through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I had the privilege of working with this seasoned veteran and was the other part of the art department educating grades nine through twelve. I also was in charge of the yearbook and social events that came with that. After I “paid my dues” at this wonderful small school, I was hired to teach 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade art and one journalism class. I currently teach 7<sup>th</sup> grade art and head up the middle school journalism team. I love my

job, my colleagues, and my students. I can’t imagine doing anything else.

Each of these events and people played an important part of determining who I am, not just as an individual, but as an art educator. The positive experiences gave me confidence while the negative ones taught me what not to do. Another important, but recent, discovery has given me even more confidence and certainty in my role and gifts as an artist/educator. A year ago, my mother discovered her biological family. Upon meeting and getting to know them, I have come to the conclusion that more things are hereditary than environmental. I was excited and surprised to discover artists, educators, musicians, and photographers in my bloodline. Loving, intelligent, creative people have influenced my entire life and continue to do so. I am excited to share the positive influences on my children, students, and other people with whom I cross paths. The support and encouragement I have been blessed with as an artist/educator will continue through my life and work.



*Nautilus*, 1996. Mosaic of scrap tiles and mortar, 12"x18"



*Sibling Love*, 2000. Graphite on paper, 20"x24"



*Emily and Ben*, 2004. Conte Crayon, 18"x24"



This page contains a small collection of some of my favorite photos. Photography became a quick way to satisfy my creative aspiration. It has also developed as a great way to share my gift with people I care about.





Georgia O'Keeffe, as well as my appreciation for nature has obviously affected my artistic growth. Being pushed to create from my imagination while I was in college has supported in a more personal expression. This page contains some of my favorite pieces over the last three years. I have given all of these acrylic paintings as gifts.

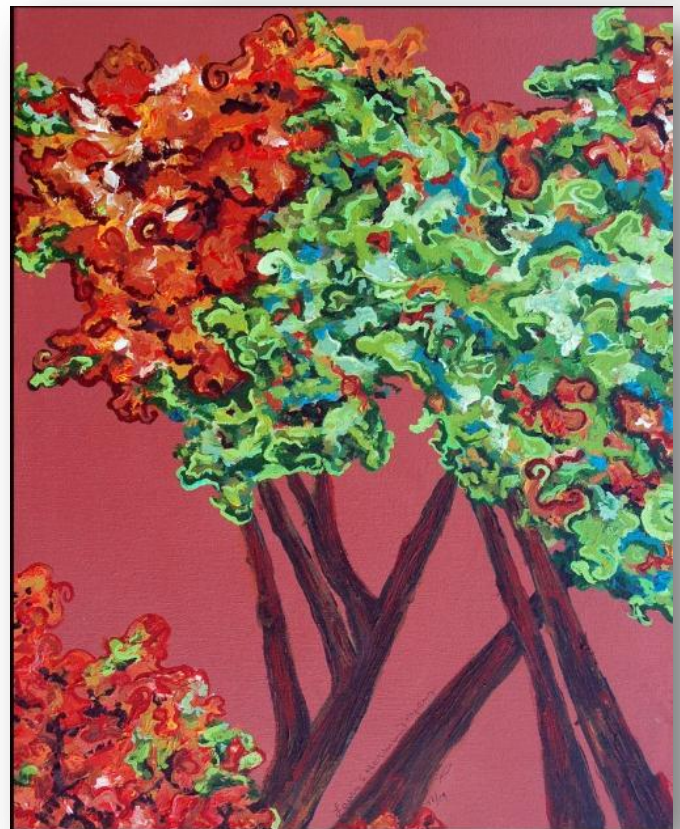


*Color Wheel*, 2010. Acrylic paint on canvas, 12"x18"



Right: *Abstract Calla*, 2005.  
Acrylic on canvas,  
8"x10"

Below: *Untitled*,  
2009. Acrylic on  
canvas, 18"x20"

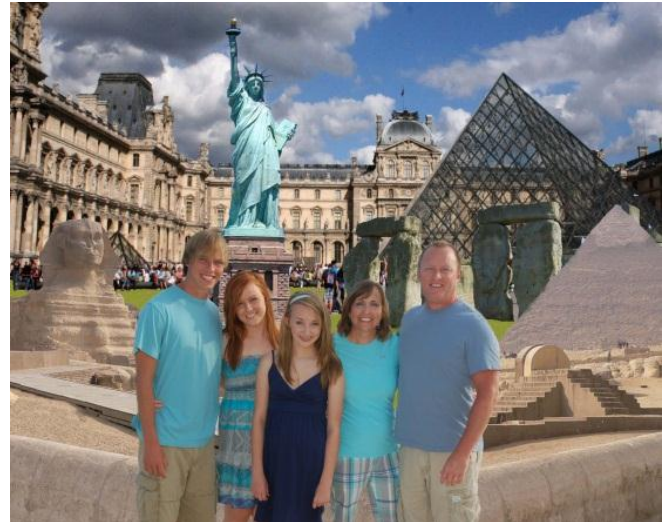




On this page, I have some of my most recent work. I believe I have grown and will continue to more fully develop as an artist and teacher because the University of Florida has positively pushed me to do so. My desire is to use more of what I've learned with technology and digital imaging. I also hope to have more time in the future for my true love; which will always be painting!



*Mrs. Cyborg Myers, 2012. University of Florida, Digital Image, Photoshop*



*Family Vacation, 2012. University of Florida, Digital Image, Photoshop*



*Mom's Identity Tree, 2012. University of Florida, collage, 16" x 20"*



*What if? 2012. University of Florida, Digital Image, Photoshop*