

Jennifer Barrineau

Story by Paul M. Howey

Jennifer Barrineau moves quickly about her small studio in the River Arts District, adding some fine brush details to a five-inch square painting and then moving to another area to work on large painting already in progress.

"I often work on several paintings at one time," she explains without looking up. There's a kinetic vibrancy about her as she paints and speaks, an undeniable

creative force at work within her.

Jennifer lived the first 11 years of her life in the hilly farmlands of Maryland north of Washington, DC. She says her earliest recollection of seeing art created was watching her father, a draftsman, drawing monsters and cartoon characters for her. "I was amazed. I thought it was the most wonderful magical ability."



Her family moved to Sarasota, Florida, where Jennifer grew up fishing, rummaging through tide pools, and shelling. She decided she wanted to be a marine biologist.

All the while, however, she was drawing and painting, making candles, and working with stained glass. "People really loved my drawings," she recalls. "That was my thing—super tight, realistic pencil drawings, of animals mostly." She says her mother was (and continues to be) one of the greatest supporters of her art.

Sarasota is home to Ringling School of Art and Design, and so Jennifer decided to put together a portfolio of her work and present it to the school. They were duly impressed and she was awarded a scholarship. "I took it as a sign to give up on the idea of being a marine biologist," she says smiling. She graduated from Ringling in 1994 with a bachelor's degree in illustration.

Over the next several years, Jennifer worked in computer-assisted design, creating artwork for various clients. At one point, she headed to New Orleans and did similar work for Sonics, Fat Tuesdays, Sea World, and various other firms.

She returned to Sarasota and got a job creating T-shirt designs, including some for Girls Scouts of America, Disney Sports, the Rose Bowl, and the Super Bowl.

"Yes," she says, "I have storage tubs full of cups, T-Shirts, and other trademarked items that I designed." These jobs, however had a cumulatively stifling effect on her own sense of creativity.

After many years of sitting in front of computers in gray rooms with gray carpet and fluorescent lighting, she called it quits. "I had to get out in the light, the fresh air, and get back in control of my ideas and what I needed them to say."

Having visited Western North Carolina on numerous



occasions, she thought the area would be a good place to reestablish herself. So in 2007, she and her son Graham moved to Asheville. The move also brought her closer to her mother who'd moved to the area just a few years earlier.

With all these changes came another personal revelation. "I was going to delve into painting, creating my own art, putting it out there for the world to see." From this moment on, she knew she would focus on her son and on her art. "My two greatest loves."

It worked. Her paintings have become popular for their content and visual messages. She paints all day long, stopping long enough to pick up Graham from Art Space Charter School and return to her studio, where he likes to paint, too.

She takes her inspirations from many sources—memories, music, books, nature, conversations. "I believe a painting is not finished until it becomes like a piece of music. There should be highs and lows, and fast areas and slower ones, that move the eye through the painting."

Jennifer's medium of choice is acrylics. "I use the highest



quality paints and the cheapest brushes I can find. The paint is the most important." She holds up an old brush, bristles shortened and stiffened with use. "If I do this to my brushes, why should I pay a lot for them?" she jokes. She also likes to use the mist from a spray bottle to soften brushstrokes into ephemeral lines.

This spring, at Woolworth Walk, she'll begin teaching painting to small groups of kids, teenagers, and adults. It'll bet seven-year-old Graham will be there assisting.

Her paintings can be seen at Woolworth Walk, 25 Haywood Street, and Chris Van Dyke Jewelry & Fine Craft, 29 Biltmore Avenue, both in downtown Asheville. For more information about the artist, visit jenniferbarrineauart.com.