

ARTISTIC STATEMENT

“ The love one has for their animal is pure and unfettered. My portraits become an expression of that love - capturing their essence is critical to my work.”

BIOGRAPHY

Heather is an animal portrait artist based in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and has been painting for the past 15 years. Her work can be found in homes throughout North America.

Born and raised in Toronto, one of five children, Heather's mentor throughout much of her life was her father, Norman Laws, a talented and successful commercial artist and illustrator, with a sterling reputation among his peers.

It was her father who, in her formative years, was instrumental in nurturing Heather's artistic talents and impulses. He provided her not only with the unfailing artistic and emotional support so necessary to Heather's artistic development, but also his unflinching constructive criticism. The value of this mentoring, particularly coming from someone with a background in such a demanding profession, is today reflected in the care, precision and authenticity with which Heather renders all her subjects. Heather's father died early in 2008, a heavy loss to her and to all her family.

Heather's natural abilities as an artist exhibited their fullness in her high school days at North Toronto Collegiate Institute. Her exposure to life drawing the full figure and portraiture, along with the creative expression provided through sculpture and textile, had a lasting impact on her subsequent life. Her favorite assignments during those early years often depicted the horse along with the occasional wolf. For Heather, drawing and painting became, from that moment on, both a necessity and a driving life-force.

Heather went on to study Anthropology and Religion & Culture for four years at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. During that time she nevertheless continued to pursue her artistic development. At one point, she won a university competition to create an illustration reflective of a poem chosen from a yearly poetry collection to be published. Her winning Pen & Ink drawing can be found in the 1987 WLU Book of Poetry.

Heather's ability to capture a subject's true likeness was recognized when her university professor herself purchased a portrait of a live model which she completed during that time, a model who also happened to be a close friend of the professor

Upon graduation, Heather took on various jobs to support herself, including those of an Insurance Claim Adjuster, a Frammer and even a seller of advertising space for construction publications. However art always remained the underlying passion. And Heather continued to feed and nurture that force through her participation in numerous artistic workshops, and life drawing and portraiture classes.

After a few such years in the working world, Heather accumulated enough savings to make a very important purchase: - her first horse, 'Maggie'.

Heather had always yearned for her own horse, dating from the time, when, at the age of ten, she had started to take summer camp riding lessons. At the end of every such summer, Heather would implore her parents to allow her to adopt her then latest steed, - alas, to no avail. Now, at the age of 27, 'Maggie' entered her life, a 2 1/2 year-old, 16.3 hand, dark bay Clydesdale/Thoroughbred mare, with large soulful eyes and an adorable personality to match. It was a pairing made in heaven, and Heather and Maggie have gone on to celebrate their 18th anniversary together this past February, 2008.

In the spring of 1991, Heather moved to a horse farm in Tottenham, just north of Toronto (and where she would keep Maggie). There she rented the Cabin at the back of the property, situated just at the edge of a stand of trees with a living room bay- window overlooking the paddocks and riding ring. It provided an ideal and tranquil setting for furthering her work and artistic development.

But something was still missing... a dog!

So, in May of 1991, with a friend in tow, Heather's quest brought her to the Toronto Humane Society, where she was fated to meet "Jesse", a year-old jet-black Labrador/Great Dane cross. Mutual adoption was instantaneous, and a very excited Jesse was ultimately manoeuvred into a little Pontiac Firefly hatchback, and brought "home". Jesse would be Heather's constant companion until his death on Easter Sunday, April 11, 2004.

Back at the Cabin and farm, all was now complete. It was here, in this picturesque and tranquil setting, that Heather (with the full support of Maggie and Jesse), actively launched her career as an animal painter. Maggie and Jesse became her 'muses', as Heather spent many months developing a body of work to display at local horse shows and art festivals.

During that period, Heather also became an active member of The New Tecumseh Arts Council, and she received immeasurably support from that close-knit artists' community. Some of the artists she met during those years remain her friends to this day.

Taking odd jobs at local horse stables to supplement her income, Heather ultimately found her way to Toronto's Woodbine Race Track where, for three years, she immersed herself in the life of a groom. Her experience there also included a six-month sojourn working as a groom in New Orleans, Louisiana, at a track known as 'The Fair Grounds'. Yet, despite the fact that life as a groom was very demanding, with long hours, Heather still found time for her calling.

In 1996, after some encouragement from her peers, she approached and proudly received a commission from the Dollase family, owners of three thoroughbreds who were then participating in the prestigious Breeders Cup Event at Woodbine. Their filly, 'Jewel Princes', was the 1996 Breeders Cup Distaff Champion. Heather had the privilege of painting all three Dollase horses, which also included the filly 'Windsharp' and the colt 'Helmsman'. The positive reception accompanying these commissions did much to advance her early artistic career.

Her years spent as a groom were, of course, long and often difficult, but Heather considers the experience as invaluable, particularly for the artistic and emotional insights into, and appreciation for, the horses which passed through her hands. But, by 1997, it was time to move on. And that move was to commit to art as a full-time endeavor.

By the fall of 2007, after extensive hands-on self-promotion, Heather came to enjoy the fruits of her many earlier labors, receiving numerous commissions. By the following year, her decision to pursue her artistic career full-time was abundantly validated by the positive responses to her work and the increased demand for her time.

Since 1998, Heather has exhibited her work at numerous shows, greatly assisted by her supportive siblings and other family members, along with her close-knit circle of friends. And among the former is 'Lola', the newest family addition, a happy three-year old black Labrador, who, incredibly, had managed to fill the void left by the passing of Jesse.

Today, Heather continues to pursue her career and professional development and has, most recently, been studying Portraiture in Oil under the tutelage of John Viljoen's "Master Class in Portraiture".

Heather continues to reside in Toronto where she is much sought after for her sensitive and insightful animal portraits, and from where she continues to accept commissions.



Selected Showings:

- ◇ The Beaches Arts Show, Kew Gardens, Toronto
- ◇ The Outdoor Toronto Show, Nathan Philips Square, Toronto,
- ◇ Cabbagetown Arts and Crafts Show, Riverdale Park, Toronto
- ◇ Tournament of Champions, Boulevard of Champions Arts and Craft Fair, York Equestrian Centre, Cedar Valley, ON
- ◇ Arts Naturally, Scarborough Arts Council, Guild Inn, Toronto
- ◇ South River Arts Festival, South River, ON
- ◇ Art in the Park, Oakville Arts Council, Oakville ON
- ◇ Caledon Fall Arts Festival, Caledon ON
- ◇ The Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, Exhibition Hall, Toronto ON
- ◇ The One of a Kind Spring Craft Show, National Trade Centre, Toronto,

Some of Heather's Other Accomplishments include:

- ◇ Honorable Mention for her painting "Blue Collar Worker" at the Nevada County Draft Horse Classic, Grass Valley, California
- ◇ Two Pastel Works Juried into the Pastel Artists of Ontario 8th Annual Open Juried Show "Purely Pastel", 1999
- ◇ Featured in "The Pastel Journal" October, 2004, "Painting Pets with Personality" by Deborah Christensen Secor,

Affiliations

Heather is also affiliated and has a long-standing membership in the Equine Art Guild, the Canine Art Guild, and Wet Canvas, an online forum for artists.

Art Donations

Heather has donated custom commissioned portraits to the following organizations to help raise funds for their causes:

- ◇ Camp Oochigeas, A Camp for Kids with Cancer, Muskoka, Ontario – ‘Evening of Summer Dreams’ Silent Auction Donations (made on 3 occasions)
- ◇ C.A.R.D. ‘Community Association for Riding for the Disabled’ – G. Ross Lord Park, Toronto
- ◇ The Equine Research Centre, University of Guelph, Ontario
- ◇ The Parkinson’s Society of Canada, Toronto, Ontario

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