

February 2014

Love, Loss and Art

By Fred Jones • Photos by Teri Hoover

Beginning February 28, the Newport Recreation Center will host its first Blacksburg Regional Art Association workshop. The three-day event will feature one of the pre-eminent colored pencil artists in the country, Jennifer Carpenter.

Like other artists, Carpenter speaks of an inner drive compelling her to create her work. However, her passion for art has proven to serve as a lifeline, guiding her through a maze of adversity over the course of her artistic career.

The roots of her creative leanings grew from her mother. Carpenter reminisces, "Mom did China painting on 'Gone With the Wind' lamps." These are the old style oil lamps with a painted glass base and a shade to match. She continues, "She restored them and at one time we had 300 of them in our home."

Thus, when Carpenter enrolled in Bridgewater College near her hometown of Harrisonburg, it was no surprise when she chose art for her major. She states, "I loved to draw, but my professors wanted me to paint so that I could work with color." She hated painting because brushes did not allow her the degree of control she had with pencils. She laments, "They were too floppy."

In a spirit of compromise Carpenter proposed to one of her professors, Bob Purvis, that she take an independent study class with colored pencils. Purvis responded, "I've never worked with colored pencils before, but I will get a set and learn with you." Indeed, colored



Jennifer Carpenter seated in front of her award-winning piece, "Bold and Beautiful."

pencil as a medium for fine art is relatively new. The Colored Pencil Society of America, of which Carpenter is a charter member, only began in 1990. By comparison the Watercolor Society of America began in 1866. Despite its relative obscurity, by the completion of her independent study, colored pencil had become her specialty.

After graduating in 1987 Carpenter worked in an art store in Harrisonburg, eventually becoming the manager. She recalls, "I saved all I could to eventually purchase my first set of professional colored pencils." She married, gave birth to her son, Ben, all the while honing her artistic skills and completing commissioned portraits.

It was 2000 when the first of a series of setbacks began. Carpenter recalls, "The week after Thanksgiving my first husband unexpectedly walked out on us and about six weeks later my Mom died." She found herself the single mother of a kindergarten-aged child in need of a regular paycheck and mourning the loss of her mother.

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■ Upcoming

February 14

BRAA Luncheon and Art Spot

11:30 a.m., Famous Anthony's, Blacksburg

Join fellow art enthusiasts for lunch and conversation. This month's art spot is presented by the owners of Card Isle, a new kiosk way to shop for cards in Blacksburg.

February 16

Color: Chemistry, Particles, and Magic

2-3 p.m., Blacksburg Recreation Center

Conversations in color will be led by Chuck Hoover of Hoover Color Corporation, one of the world's largest producers of umber, sienna, and ochre paints. Come and learn more about the science, psychology, and history behind color. Free and open to the public.

February 28 – March 2

Colored Pencil Workshop by Jennifer Carpenter

9 a.m. – 4 p.m. each day, Newport Recreation Center

Come experience colored pencil work like you've never seen before! Nationally-acclaimed artist Jennifer Carpenter will bring 30 years of experience, a wealth of information, and much enthusiasm to this workshop. The fee is \$125 for BRAA members and \$150 for non-members. Application and further information available online under the events tab at www.blacksburgart.org.

March 13

Opening Reception: Painting with Paper

6-8 p.m., Glencoe Museum, Radford

This exhibit features works by Martha Olson and will be on display through April 31. For more information, contact the Glencoe Museum at 540-731-5031.

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Living in Radford at the time, Carpenter applied for a job as a school bus driver. She laughed, "I believe they were afraid of the thought of me driving a school bus and instead I was given a job as a special ed aid." It wasn't long before she was encouraged to get her masters degree in special education. She responded, "How am I supposed to be a single mother, hold down a job and attend grad school?"

Rather than set aside her art, it became a motivating factor that helped lead her through this seemingly insurmountable scenario. She remarked, "Drawing allowed me to have 'alone time' with things that belonged to Mom. I think I did some of my



It may appear to be raining in Jennifer Carpenter's studio, but these water droplets were created by her with her colored pencils.

best work during that period." Her piece, "Still Life Without Mom," won an award for excellence in the 2002 Artist's Magazine International Exhibition. Carpenter had established herself as one of the premier colored pencil artists in the world.

In 2005 Carpenter earned her masters degree and held a solid position in the Radford school system. Though she found her work rewarding, as she

describes it, "You become so woven into the needs of the families you serve that it can consume you." But when Ben graduated from high school she had fulfilled a promise to allow him to remain in Radford with his circle of friends. She felt like, "Now it was time for me to get back to my happy place. My blood pressure was through the roof, my cholesterol was bad ... am I going to have a stroke and have to watch the world go by and not be able to do this thing that I want to do?"

Adversity was to strike again in 2012. However, this time it provided the impetus that propelled her into art full time; Carpenter lost her father after a long illness that often left him uncommunicative. She states, "He was proud of my master's degree, but he knew it was not my passion. For me to have this thing that Mom had and not be using it ... that was hard for him. When he had lucid moments he would tell me. 'Don't give up the art.'" With the support of her new husband, Neal, she vowed, "to do whatever would most honor Mom and Dad."

Within a week of leaving her job in 2013 Carpenter faced yet another loss; a fire destroyed much of her home. But in typical "Jennifer" fashion she looked for the positive side of this hardship. Since the rebuilding of her house she feels, "This is the nicest place I have ever had to work." She sits in her new studio surrounded by row after row of hundreds of colored pencils like a musician surrounded by tiers of keyboards only her instruments are all the colors of the rainbow. As she discusses her pencil sets she lovingly uses terms like, "buttery" or "dry" or "lightfast" as if she were a wine connoisseur describing bottles in a cellar.

Carpenter once aspired to create stark work along the lines of Andrew Wyeth. She exclaims, "When I found colored pencil and discovered just how colorful it can be it was like, 'Pow.'" She now looks to the work of other colored pencil artists for inspiration stating, "I see their work and it takes my breath away. I see what other people have accomplished and I want to raise my bar a little bit."

When choosing subjects for her fine art work she insists, "It's got to be something that I absolutely love, because I spend 40, 60, 80 hours on a piece." Many of those

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■ Exhibit Opportunities

Art in 16 Squares

May – September

This group project will feature 16 12" square pieces mounted "on point." All BRAA members are invited to submit finished pieces for jurying. Entry deadline is **March 1**. The project will debut at the opening of the Alexander Black House on May 1 and will remain until early September. For more information, visit the Events tab at www.blacksburgart.org.

56th Annual Sidewalk Art Show May 31 • 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. • Roanoke

This annual event takes place on the downtown streets near the Taubman Museum of Art. The application fee is \$25 and a 10 x 10' display site is \$125 for accepted artists. The entry deadline is **March 15**. For a prospectus, visit <http://www.taubmanmuseum.org/main/>.

BRAA Annual Theme Exhibit July 17 – October 13 • VTLs, Inc.

The focus of this year's show is "family." Artists are invited to create works based on their own interpretations of this theme in any 2 or 3D medium. Open to all members of BRAA and other art associations in Montgomery, Floyd, or Giles counties. Entry deadline is **July 1**. For more information, visit the events tab at www.blacksburgart.org.

■ Other Opportunities

Steppin' Out Design Contest

Downtown Blacksburg, Inc., is sponsoring a design competition for the Steppin' Out 2014 T-Shirt. For more information, visit <http://www.downtownblacksburg.com/>.

Figure Drawing

The Artful Place, A Fine Art Studio at 106 Faculty Street, offers live model drawing opportunities. Upcoming Sunday sessions are **Feb. 16, March 2, and March 16**. Cost is \$10 per session and easels and drawing boards are provided. Reserve your spot by emailing diana@creekmorelaw.com by the Thursday before each session. Space is limited to eight participants.

■ President's Report

Thanks to everyone who has worked so hard since I became president of the organization. I am amazed at how much has been accomplished in such a short time. Here is a roundup of happenings:

- Jennifer Carpenter workshop set for Feb. 28 – March 2
- Chuck Hoover presentation on color set for Feb. 16
- David Pearce workshop on photographing artwork April 27
- A news release listing compiled to help everyone keep track of how they advertise their events
- Two new community galleries added: Blue Ridge Cancer Care and Pointe West Management. One gallery withdrew due to corporate changes (StellarOne). New schedule set and posted to our webpage.
- Gerri Young, Jeanette Bowker, and Bill Pulley met with our accountant, Alice Ledford
- January board meeting (see photo, below right) held in the Newport Recreation Center. Fred Jones produced great minutes!
- Decided to stay on longer in the Community Arts Information Office (CAIO) and to really utilize the space by taking proactive measures
- Held our January luncheon with a wonderful Art Spot by Jennifer Carpenter with 16 attendees
- Updated post office box records to reflect the current people authorized to receive mail
- The pass-along files for the president are being updated
- Some different versions of the artist statement used in community galleries posted on our website
- A printer-friendly version of the membership application created and posted on the website
- Several new members have signed on!



photo: Teri Hoover

Please go to www.blacksburgart.org to see full minutes and progress report.

Your partner in art,
Gerri Young

Hats off to volunteers

Big thanks to all the volunteers who have helped BRAA move forward in the last few months — all the officers, membership chair, newsletter team, gallery committee and chairs and to the following for helping on special projects:

Fred Jones, Gerri Young, Jennifer Carpenter, Marie Collier, Tom Barnhart, Tess Jones, Lisabeth Weisband, Denisse Bento, Nancy Norton, Betty Moore, Teri Hoover, Charlotte Chan, Ava Howard, Jordi Calvera, Robi Salee, and Bill Pulley.

These folks made it possible to do the BRAA show at The JAX in Floyd, judge two school art competitions, create a financial spreadsheet and hold a board meeting in Newport.

If we missed your name, please know we didn't mean to and we really appreciate all you have done for BRAA.

■ Now Showing

January 15 – April 15

(except where indicated otherwise)

Jeanette Bowker, See Mark Optical, Blacksburg

Jordi Calvera and **Darcy Meeker**, Blue Ridge Cancer Care, Blacksburg (coming Feb. – April)

Jennifer Carpenter, Pointe West Management, Blacksburg (coming Feb. – April)

Teri Hoover, Mill Mountain Coffee and Tea, Blacksburg

Fred Jones, Zeppoli's, Blacksburg

Vikki King, Community Arts Information Office (CAIO), downtown Blacksburg (February)

Susan Lockwood, ICTAS, Virginia Tech Campus (until mid-May)

Larry Mitchell, ICTAS, Virginia Tech Campus (until mid-May)

David Pearce, VTLS, Corporate Research Center, Blacksburg

Diane Relf, Virginia Tech Women's Center, Blacksburg

Robi Salee, Brown Insurance, Blacksburg

Gerri Young, Real Life Dental Care, Blacksburg

BRAA membership rates increasing — renew now!

Effective March 1, most membership rates will increase. January is renewal month and if you haven't done so, act soon to ensure the current rate. Membership information and a downloadable form are available at www.blacksburgart.org. Please send your form and check to: BRAA, PO Box 525, Blacksburg, VA 24063.

"The Great Creator has gifted us with creativity. Our gift back is our use of it."

~ Julia Cameron



Attendees at January's lunch and art spot were eager to experiment with the Icarus board introduced during Jennifer Carpenter's presentation on colored pencils. Shown from left are Jean Galloway, Betty Moore, and Charlotte Chan. This month's lunch and art spot is Feb. 14 at 11:30 a.m. at Famous Anthony's in Blacksburg. David Henry from Card Isle is this month's guest speaker.

Photo: Gerri Young

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subjects other artists would never consider: a doorknob, or a dead fly for example. But Carpenter has a story behind each of her creations and manages to imbue each work with a sense of mystery or emotion.

In the past year Carpenter won the People's Choice award in the "Chiaroscuro" exhibit at the Jacksonville Center in Floyd and garnered honors at both the New River Art Biennial in Blacksburg and Jacksonville Center juried shows. She has resumed her commissioned portrait work. But as she moves forward into this new phase of her career she would like to do more gallery shows that include a large body of her work.

Asked about her upcoming BRAA workshop Carpenter says, "I'm going to start out so that an alien could take my class." But with unbridled enthusiasm she exclaims, "I want to spew forth 30 years of experience in three days." That experience will include such new technology as drawing on a heated surface called Icarus Board.

There can be no doubts workshop participants will gain significant knowledge and insights into this medium. But looking into the story of this remarkable woman we can all learn the potential art holds as a tool for coping with the many and varied hardships life can present. For information about the workshop access the BRAA website at <http://www.blacksburgart.org> ■

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March 18, 20, and 21

Watercolor Boot Camp
9 a.m. – 3 p.m. (Tues., Thur., Fri.),
Christiansburg Presbyterian Church

This three-day painting workshop is taught by Robin Poteet and benefits the Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Arts Center. Exercises, demos, discussions, and creativity for those with basic watercolor experience and beyond. The fee is \$175. Contact the museum at 540-382-5644 to register.

April 27

How to Photograph 2D and 3D Artwork
2 – 4 p.m., Blacksburg Library

Getting quality images of your artwork is important for advertising, gallery submissions, and as a record-keeping tool. This session is taught by BRAA member David Pearce, and will cover important technical considerations as well as practical examples using professional as well as basic equipment. Attendees are encouraged to bring small items (under 12" cube) for experimentation. Workshop is free and open to the public.

The art featured in this month's nameplate is "Rhapsody in Blue" (right, fused glass, 10 x 10") by Larry Mitchell. This and more of his work can be viewed at ICTAS on the Virginia Tech campus through the middle of May.



BRAA Officers

Gerri Young, president
Charlotte Chan, co-vice president
Teri Hoover, co-vice president
Jeanette Bowker, treasurer
Fred Jones, secretary
Tom Barnhart, membership



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Send Facebook news postings to:
Gerri Young at
younggerri@googlemail.com
or **Nancy Norton**
at nancypnorton@comcast.net

Twitter @BlacksburgArt1

<http://www.blacksburgart.org/>

Send news, photos, comments, or newsletter suggestions to Lois Stephens (stephens1@pemt.net)

Thanks to Mish Mish for providing printed versions of this newsletter. Please support our local art supply store!

