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## Interview with Artist Bonnie Kelso

- What was it that drew you to art and how did you get started painting?

As a little kid I was always drawing. My parents recognized my interest at an early age and found a local artist to give me private art lessons when I was only five years old. Then I started making little cartoons that I would sell to my class-mates on the bus on the way to school for a quarter each. I started painting and working in acrylics and oils when I was in high school. I was a part of the band program in high school, so I never had enough electives left to take art classes. I would take classes at an artist co-op called the Torpedo Factory in Alexandria, Virginia. This is how I developed my portfolio for applying to art school. ·

- How long have you been painting?

I've been painting on and off now for 34 years. When I left art school I tried to keep working on my art, but bills seemed to get in the way. I was fortunate enough to find an entry level job as an exhibit designer, where I learned to use my creative skills to make a living. I worked very hard at that job for 12 years before deciding to quit and pursue fine art again full time.

I found it very difficult to work at both careers simultaneously.

- Is anyone in your family an artist?

I have a lot of creative people in my family, but none of them had pursued a career in fine art before. My father is an architect and my god-father was an interior designer. I think they really

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Tuesday 5:30 PM

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encouraged me the most and believed that I could succeed as an artist.

- What was the first piece you painted?

I have a small painting of a frog sitting on a lily pad framed and hung in my studio. I painted it when I was five. I like to think this was my first successful painting. At least it made it into a frame and survived all these years. Shortly after September 11th, 2001, I created a series of three pastels that I feel define the beginnings of my current style. In fact one is titled, "beginnings." These pieces really seemed to come from a new place inside of me. It was an exciting personal discovery, but frustrating, because I felt so distracted by the life I had built for myself, and couldn't seem to create any more. I was aware that my life needed a drastic change. I felt that somehow I had gotten off track. It took three years to save up some money, quit my job, sell my home and leave my life behind to move west. Then, after a few years of soul searching and world travel, I was ready to paint again.

- What inspires your work?

I am inspired by the natural world. Even as a kid I had a subscription to National Geographic. My fascination with nature and the great outdoors baffled my family who were very much city people. Later, when I worked as an exhibit designer, I got to create exhibits about nature and exotic places. But this only whetted my appetite. I needed to see it for myself. When I traveled abroad I experienced some beautiful and dramatic natural places. I witnessed first-hand how connected everything on the planet is. It truly inspired me to express my love for nature through my own unique voice. Living in Las Vegas has been a wonderful experience. My husband and I explore the desert and National Parks in all directions from here. I have so many stories to tell through painting that I can hardly keep up with it. I also find a lot of inspiration from the ocean. I've been a diver for ten years now, and the things I see underwater never cease to amaze me. ·

- Have you experimented with any other forms of art?

As an art student I studied printmaking, which included working with silkscreen, lithography, etching and woodcuts. I also loved my ceramics classes. I even dabbled with glass blowing, which is incredibly exciting. I think I am drawn most to painting because it affords me the most control. I feel I am able to express myself in a more precise way through this medium. I also write a lot about my work and the inspirations behind the work. Writing is another art form to me. ·

- What part of being an artist do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? What do you like and not like about working in this field?

The most satisfying thing about being an artist is being able to share my work with others. I feel I am spreading a message of love for nature. Being able to touch others through these experiences and interpretive visions of nature brings me a lot of joy. The most challenging part of the job is the sales aspect. I tend to enjoy the marketing part a lot more than the actual sales part. I don't like to argue over the value of a painting. I have met a lot of interesting people since becoming a full time artist. Sharing ideas and experiences with other artists is always a lot of fun and invigorating. I also enjoy meeting people who are touched by my work in some way unexpected. It fascinates me how people react to it sometimes. One of my best audiences are 8 year old girls. They just always seem to get it! There are some frustrating things about the field of fine art, too. But I try not to focus on those things. I've been fortunate so far, and I feel that a positive attitude is the only thing that will keep me afloat in this business. Being able to exhibit my work in the community at alternative gallery spaces like Northwest Yoga Studio is a huge benefit. I am able to reach out to a whole new audience for my work this way.

- Are you working on anything now?

Right now, I am actually writing a novel. It's something I have wanted to do for many years, and the time is now right. Once I get it under way, I'll be able to focus on painting again. I still have a list of unpainted experiences I want to tackle in the future. So, painting will not take the back burner for long!

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