

An Artist's Journey: In Conversation with DeElla Hoberg

By Marilyn DeCusati



DeElla Hoberg creates original watercolor and mixed-media artwork inspired by the beauty of nature, personal memories, and life's meaningful moments. A natural storyteller, DeElla brings each piece to life with a unique narrative that invites viewers to pause, connect, and discover the story within.

In this interview, DeElla shares insights into her artistic journey, creative inspiration, and the experiences that have shaped her distinctive approach to art.

M: What first drew you to watercolor and mixed media as your primary artistic mediums?

D: It's actually a funny story. I had an art business where I primarily worked with wood, creating boxes, small tables, and other pieces for homes. My most popular items were large wooden signs, which I hand-painted with acrylics for restaurants and other businesses. At the time, my work was more focused on home and business décor than fine art. Then, I had to have shoulder surgery. During my recovery, it became clear that I needed to work with something physically lighter. That's when I turned to watercolor, which quickly became my favored medium.

I generally begin with watercolor and then bring in other mediums if they help me tell the story I want to tell. Since I already have a variety of tools and materials in my home studio, if I can't achieve the effect I'm looking for with one medium, I might add ink, charcoal, or texture - whatever is relevant to the piece and makes sense for the story.

M: Nature, memory, and storytelling seem central to your work. What experiences most influence your paintings?

D: I think everybody loves a story. I'm an avid reader, and reading is something I do every day. I also love music. It's central to my life and to the way I process information. Even though I'm a visual artist, I enjoy writing my own blog posts and I have a strong journaling habit. Most of the time, a painting begins with a feeling or a glimmer of an idea, but it usually doesn't become a painting until I have a story in place. I'll often journal about it and may sketch something before I ever start painting. I enjoy camping and painting plein air, but I mostly use that as an exercise. For me, there needs to be a story I'm trying to tell. There is almost always a story behind my paintings.

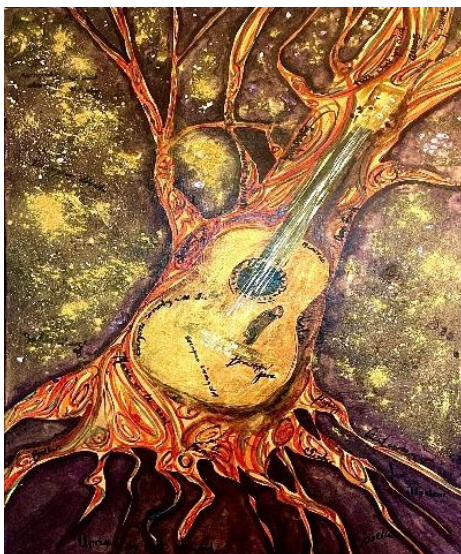
For example, I've recently started a new series about music and memories. I'm only a few paintings into it and am still doing research. I've been asking old friends and relatives about their musical memories and taking notes. I've been to hundreds of live shows myself, and I have many music memories from when I was younger and living in Sacramento. That's what initially got me thinking about this series. I want to dive much deeper into the relationship between music and memory. I'm not particularly interested in famous musicians or celebrities. I'm more interested in how music makes you feel and the memories it brings back.

One story my mom told me from when she was in nursing school has always stayed with me. She couldn't find a babysitter, so she would take me with her to her Music Appreciation class. I would sit quietly under her desk with my eyes closed and listen. *Peter and the Wolf* was my favorite.

I was also talking with a dear friend after his mother passed away a year ago. He told me that in 2021, when the Rolling Stones were in town, he went to the concert with her. She almost got kicked out because she wasn't supposed to be dancing in the aisle. He said it was so wonderful to see his mother, at 89 years old, become a teenager again.

That's what I'm thinking about with this series. That's just one example of the memories music can evoke - and we all have them. Music can take you places you couldn't get to any other way.

M: Do you begin with a clear vision, or does the painting reveal itself as you work?



D: Yes and yes. There are times when I literally wake up with a painting crystal clear in my head. That happened with *Trigger*, my painting of Willie Nelson's guitar. I had been thinking about it for about a week, but then I dreamed about it. When I woke up, I painted it from start to finish in about two hours because all the creative work had already been done. I just had to do the work of putting it on canvas.

That kind of experience does happen, but it can be rare. I believe inspiration often happens while I'm working. I paint almost every day, and I try to do something creative every day. It may not always be a painting, but it must be something creative.

M: What inspired you to begin teaching watercolor classes?

D: It's difficult to make a living from your art. I enjoy selling my work at in-person venues because I get immediate feedback and have the opportunity to tell the stories behind my art. I have good sales at those events,

but they're seasonal. Teaching initially started as a way to stabilize my income. I didn't realize how much I would love it. Teaching art brings me enormous joy.

For me, it's really about access. I didn't go to art school, but I've spent a great deal of time educating myself about art. I took every class and opportunity I could afford. Making art is a skill, but it's so much more than that. You can learn the technical skills to paint a tree, for example, but that alone won't teach you how to think creatively or express yourself.

I'm not teaching people to simply copy something. I'm teaching them how to think about color, including the relationships between warm and cool colors. We use only six colors, and we learn how to build our own values and shadows. I like to introduce high-level concepts in a beginner class because I think it can shorten the learning curve exponentially. Thinking about what you want to paint and, more importantly, *why* you want to paint it - that's what I want to teach. My goal is for students to become their own artists.

Observation is another important part of my teaching. Before we start painting, we talk about how to really look at the subject - how to observe a tree rather than simply paint what we think a tree is supposed to look like.

Most of all, I want to teach people how to create without fear. I want them to quiet the inner critic, give themselves permission to fail, and explore fearlessly. As artists, or even as people who are just beginning to make art, we can be incredibly critical of ourselves and our work. I try to help students recognize that inner critic, set it aside, and give themselves the freedom to explore.



M: I'm so intrigued by your refurbished 1973 VW Bus, Penny Lane, and how she adds – literally - to your artistic journey. Tell us about her.

D: My husband likes to work on cars, especially VW Bugs, which he had when he was younger. I bought Penny Lane because she's just so cool, and I wanted to use her to travel to art markets.



I've added curtains and fairy lights, and I can even turn her into a pillow fort with mattresses. I recently took her to an art market in St. Simons. When you go out on the road with Penny Lane, you cannot be inconspicuous. Everyone waves and cheers, and it's a lot of fun. I named her Penny Lane after a character played by Kate Hudson in one of my favorite movies, *Almost Famous*. She's a little rough around the edges, but she's such a good-time girl! I've even memorialized her in a painting.

M.: What are you currently exploring or hoping to pursue further in your creative process?

D: I'm exploring archival varnishes and finishing waxes as alternatives to putting my watercolors behind glass, especially when I'm working with mixed media. I like to use beautiful materials that preserve the softness and texture of the work without making it feel flat.

Ultimately, I want to keep telling better stories with my art. I've also been doing very personal commissions that combine my real estate background with my art. I create house portraits as gifts for real estate clients, and I love the idea because every house - whether it's being bought or sold - has its own story

About DeElla Hoberg

DeElla is a contributing member of the Cumming Arts Center, where she serves on the Board of Directors and as Hospitality Chair.

You can explore her work at: **dellahobergarts.com**