An Artist's Journey: In Conversation with Heather Lee

Interview with Marilyn DeCusati



A passionate artist and seasoned art instructor, Heather Lee creates artwork characterized by bold colors, fluid lines, and a strong sense of movement. With a background in fine arts, graphic design, and social media, she brings a creative, contemporary approach to her work. Whether she's exploring new techniques in her own studio or encouraging young artists to experiment in the classroom, Lee's artistic practice is guided by a simple but powerful message: Inspire through art - to connect, uplift, and transform.

MD: Your artwork is known for its bold colors, fluid lines, and strong sense of movement. You also enjoy experimenting with different mediums and techniques. Is there a particular medium or technique you find yourself returning to, and what draws you to it?

HL: I usually work with acrylics because I can achieve the bright, bold colors I'm drawn to. I also almost always incorporate charcoal into my artwork because I think it adds depth and texture.



"Yellow Rose" by Heather Lee

I'm not a realistic painter. I tend to go with the flow when I'm painting. I may start with a general idea or guideline, but the finished piece can take on a life of its own. It might evolve into something cartoon-like, surreal, or even cubist. If I had to identify an artistic influence or style that resonates with me, I'd say I lean toward the early work of Georgia O'Keeffe.

I'm always experimenting, and I bring that same spirit into my classes. In fact, tonight, I'll be working with my students on charcoal portraits. It should be a fun, experimental class!



"Rainy Days" by Heather Lee

MD: You initially shared your love of art through informal lessons with family and friends and by hosting painting parties. When did you realize you wanted to turn that passion into a career as an art instructor, particularly in children's art education?

HL: I've always had a connection with children. I've coached and volunteered for years, so teaching art felt like a natural fit. I could have a bad day, walk into my class, and leave feeling completely different. My students have a way of turning a difficult day into a good one.

Teaching children has actually helped me grow as an artist. Going back to the basics with them has strengthened my own understanding of art. I believe it's important not to get stuck using just one method or medium. There's always something new to discover by experimenting with line, shape, and color theory.



Example of Lee's Classroom Wall

I encourage my students to explore and express themselves freely. For a color theory class, for example, I have them work with just three colors. It's fascinating to see what they choose to create. They learn by mixing colors and discovering what happens - even when the results aren't what they expected. Sometimes, what seems like a mistake becomes part of the learning process.

MD: Your work and teaching philosophy center on inspiring others through art. Who or what continues to inspire you?

HL: The people in my life and my students are a constant source of inspiration. Volunteering at the Arts Center is inspiring, too, because I'm surrounded by other artists. Everyone has their own style and perspective, but people are helpful, welcoming, and willing to share what they know. It's a very different experience from when I was in college and my work was being critiqued by professors. Here, there's a sense of community. Through conversations with fellow artists and through teaching, I'm constantly learning and growing.

MD: Sharing your artwork with the world takes courage. Whether a piece is displayed, submitted for a gallery exhibition, or offered for sale, putting something so personal out there can feel vulnerable. How have you learned to navigate that experience?

HL: I still keep some of my artwork to myself. Sometimes, it takes me a while before I feel ready to share a piece. But after you experience some success, it does get easier.

I tell my students that they're often going to be their own worst critics. If a piece doesn't win a competition or isn't accepted into a gallery, there's still something to learn from the experience. Over time, you learn how to process those disappointments and discover where your work fits. Every artist has a niche - people who connect with your work, appreciate it, and may even want to buy it. You have to keep creating and give yourself the opportunity to find those people.

MD: Your work has an energetic, expressive quality. What do you hope people feel or experience when they look at one of your pieces?

HL: I hope they see a piece of themselves in it. A lot of my work is emotional, so there may be something in a particular piece that catches someone's eye or resonates with them personally. One example is my painting *Beautiful Chaos*. People tell me they see different things in it, finding details or meanings that speak to their own experiences. I love that because everyone brings a different perspective to a work of art.



Lately, I've been working on smaller projects. Sometimes, I'll demonstrate a technique for my students and experiment alongside them. Those experiments can turn into finished pieces that people respond to really well. It's another reminder that you don't always know where the creative process will lead.

MD: You named your art business *Butterfly Paint Studio*, and butterflies seem to appear in other parts of your life, too - even on your car decals! What is it about butterflies that resonates so strongly with you, and what do they represent in your art and your life?

HL: Butterflies symbolize hope and resilience, and I've always been drawn to them. Hope is what keeps me positive and inspired. My connection to nature began when I was a child and spent a great deal of time with my beloved grandmother. We spent hours outdoors together, enjoying nature and planting flowers. Those memories have stayed with me and helped shape my love of nature and gardening today. Butterflies have become a meaningful symbol in my life, representing hope, growth, and the possibility of transformation.

Fun fact: Purple is everywhere in Lee's life! For her, it's another symbol of hope and a color that brings her happiness. She loves the way purple sits between blue and red, creating an incredible range of beautiful hues. It's a small but meaningful expression of the color, creativity, and optimism that inspire her every day.

Heather Lee is a member artist and contributes to the Cumming Arts Center Board of Directors as Secretary. Visit butterflypaintstudio.com for more about Heather Lee.