

## Inside the Artist - Sarah-Lee Terrat March 2015



### Tell us about your journey in art / as an artist.

I would say it follows my journey as a person. I was young when I started art. I always loved to do art. My Mom claims that I started drawing with the only medium available to me and so she had to move my crib away from the wall. In the first grade, I was trying to draw a moose. I screwed it up; it was ½ duck and ½ moose and I named it “Silly Goose”. Everyone started drawing them. That mistake became the big thing. It was silly and funny and I never stopped. I graduated as class clown in high school. Humor is like a disease, I can’t stop.

My art is parallel with life. As I evolve as an artist there are many chapters and many choices. I try many different things and have opted not to specialize in anything. I’ve done so many things; from summers painting houses with my brothers (“If you can’t see if from the road, it doesn’t exist” was our motto!), to seasonal work as a lumberjack on an all-male crew, or being a bar maid in a cowboy bar in Wyoming. I was not afraid of hard work if it was fun and interesting.

When I started my business, I was on a construction crew in NYC bringing in artwork for business office systems. I also worked for an advertising company and started freelancing murals and illustration and wound up illustrating a weekly syndicated newsletter (*Hints from Heloise*). I came to Vermont from NYC to work for *Ben & Jerry’s* as one of their environmental designers, creating branding with the tour, office space and scoop shops. It was an exciting time (they had just moved into the factory), it was like a family and I was there 12 years. Through *Ben & Jerry’s* I met my friend Ann and her husband and we started a line of pet toys (formerly *Fat Cat*) which we are still working on today. I learned how to create commercial art balanced with the needs, wants and mission of the client. Process feeds the product and I need to do both. The concept changes as you build it and it is a much more creative product.

In a way, I am not making a choice but choosing to go wherever

it leads me. Specializing would have made marketing myself easier, but looking back, I still would not change it. I have art in my life and I can’t separate myself from it.

### What is the medium you most like to work with/in? What draws you to this medium? What do you like about your materials?

I work in a lot of mediums from paint to printer’s ink. Whatever the medium is I am all about using color! I have always felt that way about color. I use all the knowledge I have of color theory (light or dark, cool or warm) and blend it to work within all the different mediums. Whether or not a piece works for me depends on whether I have used my knowledge well.

My second favorite is the grease pencil. It is simple and honest. When I am sketching, it is loose and it keeps me loose. I can’t erase it so I just have to go with it. I have to let it go and sketch honestly.



### What most inspires your work - Has there been anything that has been life changing or that has influenced your practice?

N.C. Wyeth illustrations are amazing to me. He is a storyteller extraordinaire. He’s like theater; he stages it and brings emotion and elegance to his work. And in real life, his illustrations are HUGE!

Murals are especially inspiring. I love that you leave them behind. You don’t know what your audiences experience will be and you hope that it is different things to different people. With public art, especially, what people get is a mystery.

Working with murals is more of an adventure. Every one of them has a subject and I can get lost in the research. It is fascinating to learn about the people and history. I am currently working on a mural project for the State of Vermont at the new state complex in Waterbury. When I realized I was a finalist, I went to the state hospital archives to get a sense of place.



In looking at work / artwork from State Hospital patients, I found a short and moving poem in a little red book entitled “Green and Gold”. The poem inspired me so that I chose to base the final piece for my proposal on it. In order to use it however, I had to locate a living family member to grant me permission. I used all sorts of resources (including ancestry.com) and finally managed to track down one living relative who granted me permission in an amazing letter.

I like story-telling through visuals and I like to leave people with some sort of story that doesn’t have to have a beginning or an end. It can be emotional and most exciting to create this skeleton that gets filled in with visual information from my unconscious based on the study I did. It comes out and is reflected in the artwork. I get deep in it.

### What blogs or books are you reading or would recommend?

I read all the time and it is hard to track what I’ve been through this winter! One of my favorites is *The Sot-Weed Factor* (John Barth). It is a funny, historic and vast novel about a hapless nincompoop in the 1600s that was sent to America.

Another favorite that I read over and over is *The Baron in the Trees* (Italo Calvino). It’s a fantastical, dream-like book about a man who spends his life looking down from the trees. I also enjoy reading *The Wind in the Willows* (Kenneth Grahame). I love the illustrations and it gets me ready for spring.

