

Heidi Henderson

VoyageMinnesota

Today we'd like to introduce you to Heidi Henderson.

Hi Heidi, thanks for joining us today. We'd love for you to start by introducing yourself.

I grew up on a lake outside of a small rural town in central Minnesota. My sisters and I were raised by creative parents and using our hands to create was a normal way of life and livelihood. We also spent a tremendous amount of time outdoors. Building forts, biking, skiing, camping, swimming, you name it; we embraced nature in all of its seasons.

With music (piano) and art as interests, I went to a liberal arts college where I graduated with a B.A. degree in Studio Arts. I focused on printmaking throughout the years and only took 1 painting class. It was after college with limited access to printmaking equipment that I took up painting. Starting with acrylic and moving into working with oil, my subject matter was primarily trees.

At that time I was painting on an art board that was solid, but was lacking something. I decided to go to the Reuse it Center off of Lake and Hiawatha in Minneapolis. I didn't really know what I was looking for, but I knew I would find it if it was there. As I walked through the aisles of treasures, I came across a wooden cabinet door. Curious. I continued on and found myself in front of the largest selection of full-sized doors I had ever seen. As I started flipping through them I became excited and then there it was. The perfect door. A soft grey, completely worn, scratched, and irregular in its wooden dovetailed surface. And it was only \$5! I felt like I had hit the jackpot as I maneuvered it into my small car. I brought my first of many doors home to my dad and each one he helped me cut it up into smaller pieces.

Over the years, I have found discarded doors in alleyways and at antique stores. Or, since many people know about my interest in doors, I will often have people offer doors to me. I will accept only if I am inspired by its history and character. Because I am picky, and won't accept just anything, I now have a nice selection of substrates to pull from as I need.

I honestly don't remember what prompted me to start each painting with finger painting on my wooden canvases, but that is what I did, and still do, to this day. The finger painting with acrylic is my way of connecting to the surface. To feel the history of what was before me.



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I do not want to completely cover it; instead, I leave remnants of its past. This is important to me. From my finger-painted initial layers, images emerge. From there I begin to tease out the details, working in oil with my favorite miniature Series 7 sable brushes by Winsor Newton. In addition to oil, I incorporate cold wax, solvents, embroidered linen or canvas, and powdered pigments to build up the layers of texture, form, and color. Since I have no preconceived notion of what the end result will be, what emerges is like magic to me. I have found the characters (or Beings as I like to call them) are telling their story. I have also found there are many interpretations to each visual piece as each viewer brings their own experiences to each piece.

My grandma once said a painting is not completed unless it has a title. Since then I take my time and make sure each title is just right. It's a balance of eluding to, but not giving away what the painting is all about. For some the titles come to me easily and while I'm painting. Others can't be forced and show up in their own time.

And then a while back I was inspired to take words one step further. I had the idea to share my own interpretation to the visual for a few of my paintings. I ended up writing 5 short narratives for 5 different paintings. Each story begins with "Once upon a time..." and ends with "The End". It is a fun way to extend the creative process and also help the viewer see a possible scenario unfolding between the characters. Though not every painting I am inspired to do this for. Sometimes a painting and its title is complete in and of itself.

I like to say I am a storyteller of hidden worlds and fairytales.

I'm sure you wouldn't say it's been obstacle free, but so far would you say the journey has been a fairly smooth road?

I learned early on that a struggle is actually a good thing and it is needed. Granted it's definitely no fun in the moments! But I wouldn't be who I am, and my paintings be what they are, if myself/creative process didn't have its hiccups over the years.

As you know, we're big fans of you and your work. For our readers who might not be as familiar what can you tell them about what you do?

I am thankful to be happily employed at Gale Woods Farm, one of (I think) the most beautiful parks in the Three Rivers Park District. Gale Woods is a working educational farm and the animals are raised for their meat, their wool, and their eggs. The sheep, pigs, dairy cows, and poultry are all pasture-raised; the galloway cattle are 100% grass-fed. In addition to the pastures, we have production and teaching gardens, beehives, an orchard, and a sugar bush. The 410 acres is also made up of rolling hills, woodlands, and a lakeshore.

Moving into my 16th year here, I manage the store and the products we produce. Outside of scheduling groups and answering questions, I love deciding how to make the most use of an animal when it's being sent to market. I embrace the challenge in organizing the freezers of meat. And I am known for my love of lard.

From rendering it, to using it, to teaching about it. I learned early on in my time at the Farm to embrace the seasons in a different way – the way of following the land and the animals. Thus, I am around a near constant source of inspiration. Each day also invites me to learn along the way and share what I know. I truly believe this experience influences and supports me and my creative process.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

My husband and I have created a garden over our 17 years together that is a constant source of delight, creativity, and inspiration. I have chosen plants and trees, not only for their ability to support the native inhabitants (insects, amphibians, birds, and more), I have chosen them for their visual interest. Whether it's the bloom, the seed pod, the leaf, in color or form or texture, it has been welcomed into our garden.

