

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT **Holly Nelson**



Artist-Instructor Holly Nelson

Holly Nelson's work is unabashedly intimate. During her earlier years of working with expansive landscapes, she was concerned about moving towards a warmer reflection of her personal world because she thought the subject matter would not be taken seriously. Since diving into florals, her pets and other domiciliary subjects, she has been happy to leave that type of thinking behind. Holly states, "Even Delacroix made studies of his cats."

Her work is private, catching those solitary moments of stillness. "I've always enjoyed working with animal imagery and organic round forms[.]" Whether it's her sketches or paintings using various materials, the mood of her subjects are perfectly captured.

A Minnesota native, she has also traveled and studied extensively throughout the world. After high school, she backpacked through Europe to fulfill her passion for art history by visiting the great museums, cathedrals, and historic sites she learned about in school. "I had always loved to draw and make things as a child. It really wasn't until I was a student at the University of Minnesota that I took my first real art class" During the late 70's many of the instructors had been part of the 60's art movements and as a result their style of teaching art reflected the social and political transformation of the decade.

After taking a class in African art, Holly went on to receive her BA in African Studies. Learning Swahili, she lived in both Tanzania and Nigeria for long periods of time in college. While studying abroad, she decided that she would like to use her training and experience by actively pursuing a career that would offer her the opportunity to work internationally – as a result she chose to go to law school and graduated from Syracuse University. In the following few years she "moved in a tangent that was further and further from the source of my true interests."

Upon her return to Minnesota she also chose to return to the art studio. Now married and raising a family, she finally decided to pursue a degree in fine arts. It was a long road of evening and weekend classes but she completed the degree she is most proud of.

Her first studio was at the Banfill-Locke Center for the Arts in Fridley. "I had been offered a two year artist residency which included use of my own studio, and a request that I consider offering classes from time to time. This was my first experience of teaching art, and to my surprise I discovered I really loved showing people some of the techniques I had also struggled to learn."

She found her way to MCFTA after enrolling her children in a pottery class. "While I was waiting for them outside the classroom, I was doing some sketching and the program director walked by. We started a conversation and he ended up asking me if I would ever consider teaching a drawing class. That was how I got started teaching around 1998, in the old building."

After teaching for several years, Holly became the MCFTA Adult Program Director. Before this, she didn't understand how this side of the center functioned. After leaving her position and returning to teaching she had a better appreciation of the partnership between Artist-Instructors and the administration.

As many of our Artist-Instructors tell us of working with students Holly shares, "[o]ver the years I have had the privilege of working with people who inspire me to rise to the level of their experiences and respond in a thoughtful and considered manner. When I leave the studio after a class, the students remain in my mental orbit. I frequently think of them when I see an image, or an idea pops into my head, that is related to their work or something we discussed in class. Building this kind of relationship with students and their work is one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching to me."



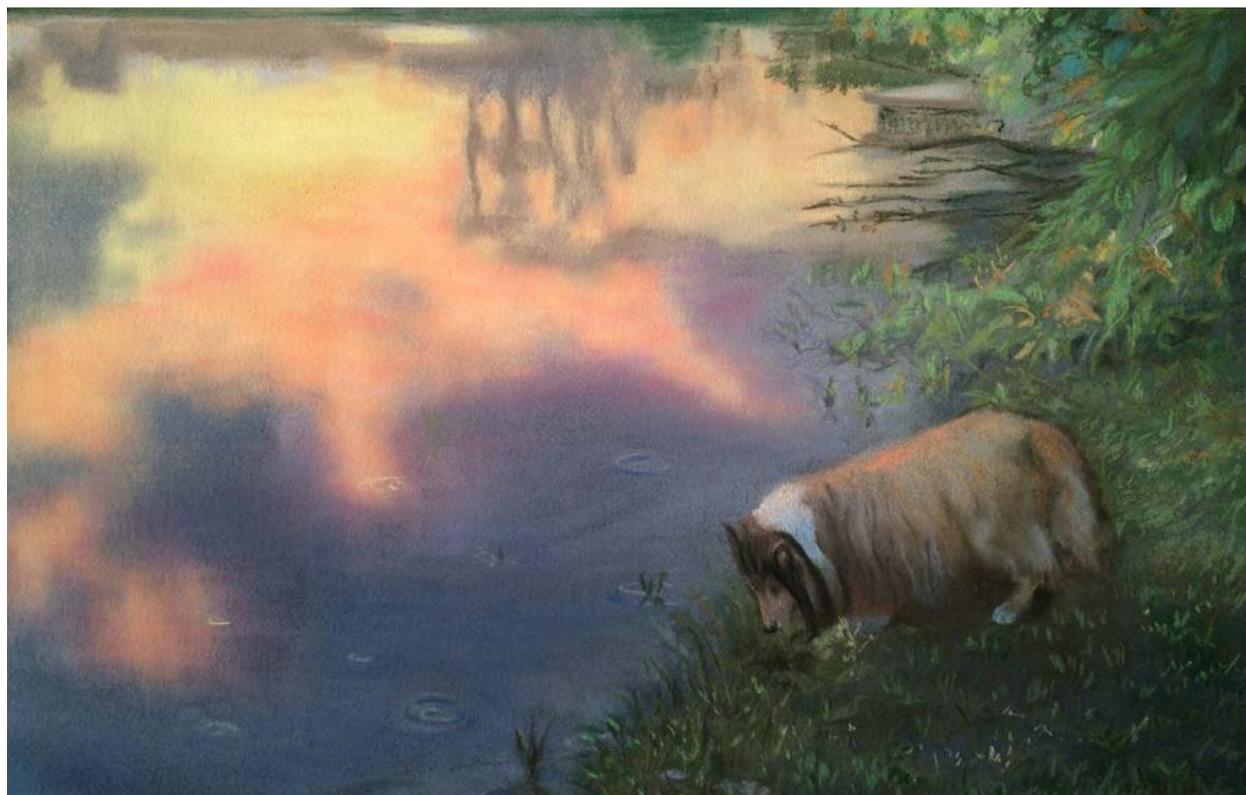
Bela Sleeping by Holly Nelson



Grove No. 7 by Holly Nelson



Kittens/Vase of Honeysuckle by Holly Nelson



Sunset Charlie by Holly Nelson