



# THE Artist's Life

## 7 WHO INSPIRE

BY ELISABETH ANDREWS PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE RAYMER



“The relationship between an artist and his art is very complex and there are no rules; it varies incredibly from artist to artist,” says David Cronenberg, director of such films as *The Fly* and *A History of Violence*, in the current issue of *Psychology Today*. No doubt the seven visual artists presented here would agree with his statement. Each one participates in the art world in a different way, from Tamar Kander’s fine-art gallery presence to Joe LaMantia’s collaborations with schoolchildren. They all have different methods, schedules, and approaches to their art, and what works for one—painting in a pub for instance, a Margie Van Auken strategy—would be unthinkable for others.

Moreover, they would likely sympathize with Cronenberg’s frustrations at being typecast. Just as the kind and polite filmmaker is thought by some to be “weird and sick” due to his graphic films, many of Bloomington’s artists battle inaccurate stereotypes. Painter Joel Washington is fed up with the “starving artist” characterization; charming multimedia artist Lindsay Hine Schroeder wishes people wouldn’t assume she’s aloof; stone carver Amy Brier has had enough of the idea that artists are “the juveniles of society who can’t help themselves” from creating art.

On the other hand, it’s hard not to draw a connection between these artists’ work and their personalities. Dimensional weaver Martina Celerin is as sunny and pleasant as her soft wool renderings of landscapes and fruits. LaMantia, a consummate extrovert, involves as many people as possible in his projects. Kander’s sophisticated abstracts match the poise and grace with which she carries herself. And Schroeder, though very friendly, is at least as quirky as her surrealist art.

Here, we offer a glimpse inside the lives of these artists, sharing both their work and the process behind it. No two are alike, and it’s clear that for these seven locals, art really is nothing short of self-expression.

Clockwise from top left: Paintings and drawings by Margie Van Auken; Tamar Kander’s *Watermusic*; *Self-Portrait in Flames* by Lindsay Hine Schroeder; Joe LaMantia with his *Animal Island*; *Wes Montgomery* by Joel Washington; Schroeder in her home with paintings *Last Night at Tutto Bène* (left) and *Sarcophilus Satanicus*; Martina Celerin’s *BFF*; Joel Washington’s *Billie Holiday*.

Center: *After* by Amy Brier.



# Tamar Kander

ABSTRACT PAINTER



(bottom left) *Mist* and (right) *Indirect Route*. Photos by Tamar Kander

Tamar Kander at home in her Brown County living room.

“If you can get the mind out of the way, the spirit and body can work together.”



*Nightfall*. Photo by Tamar Kander



(above) *Summertime* diptych. (below) *Thinking Out Loud* triptych. Photos by Tamar Kander



For Tamar Kander to create her abstract paintings, two conditions must first be met. One she satisfied decades ago by attending art school in her native South Africa and in England: “The ability to draw is necessary for an abstract artist,” she says. This grounding allows her to “unconsciously create space,” developing a balanced composition that recalls images she has encountered—from the ridge above her Brown County home to a weathered wall on a house in Martinsville.

The second requirement, however, must be fulfilled anew each time Kander enters her studio.

“I need to approach the painting with a clear mind,” she says. “It’s like what the Buddhists believe, that if you can get the mind out of the way, the spirit and the body can work together.”

Kander, 54, says that any mental constraint—an intention to paint a landscape, for instance, or to comply with a client’s request for a specific color palette—halts her creative process. “It just paralyzes me if I’m starting with some idea of how it has to turn out,” she says. “Either I can’t get the painting finished or it’s just not up to my standards.”

Those exacting standards have earned her gallery representation in Chicago, Atlanta, Santa Fe, and Indianapolis, as well as Relish in Bloomington. Her paintings hang in private homes from Terre Haute to Johannesburg, South Africa; in numerous corporate offices in New York and London; and in the permanent collection of the Indiana State Museum.

Kander, who has lived in the Bloomington area since 1988 and supports herself entirely by her paintings, works on several pieces at once, each starting with a textural layer that might include shopping lists, bits of insulation, or the sweepings from her studio floor. She continues adding paint and other materials to each canvas as it “shouts out” to her, declaring a painting finished only after she has considered it in different settings and upside-down.

Although her clientele is mostly urban, Kander prefers living near Bloomington to residing in a big city. Not only does she find inspiration in the area’s natural beauty, but she’s also more able, she says, to access that all-important mental clarity.



Lindsay Hine Schroeder in her studio with her painting *Le Secret de le Fleur*.

“I’ll see an image in my mind or a dream, and I just have to get it out.”



(below) *The Black Lodge*.



(above) *Self-Portrait in Flames*. (below) *Memorial Portrait of Lestat*.



### Stepping into Lindsay Hine

Schroeder’s house is like zipping backward in time or onto the set of *Mad Men*. All the furniture and appliances predate color television (there’s a record playing on the turntable), the kitchen is stocked with cottage cheese and corn chips, and Schroeder, wearing curlers and cat-eye glasses, shows off the navy blue 1950s pram that awaits the baby she’s expecting.

“I just think older things are more interesting to look at,” says Schroeder, 31. “Anyone’s home is going to reflect that person, and I just feel artistic and want everything around me to be that way, too.”

By day, Schroeder works as the kennel manager at a veterinary hospital, cleaning cages, sterilizing equipment, and feeding and tending to the animals. But whenever she’s home, she says, “I have to have my hands busy all the time. If I’m not painting, I’m crafting, making things like vintage-inspired glitter houses.”

Her primary medium is oil painting, and she’s best known for her whimsical-surrealist portraits of people and pets. More recently, she’s taken an impressionist turn by painting without her glasses, a bold move for someone whose vision is approximately 20/800. She has also dabbled in collage, at one point creating a collection of postcard-size images that pair German industrial photographs with photos from vintage magazines to create such effects as a lady in lingerie emerging from a smokestack.

“I’ll run across something, or I’ll see an image in my mind or a dream, and I just have to make it happen. I just have to get it out,” she says of her creative process.

To keep track of ideas, she pastes photos and sketches in an old phone book to use for reference and inspiration. Though she doesn’t paint every day—“If I did, even my ceilings would be covered”—Schroeder says that making art is as essential to her as breathing.

“If I couldn’t create art, I don’t think I could live. If I lost my hands, I would learn how to paint with my toes, because I’d have to,” she says. “I think about things like that. I worry sometimes.”



# Martina Celerin

DIMENSIONAL WEAVER

Martina Celerin had her breakthrough moment sitting on the floor in her kitchen. A molecular geneticist who came to Bloomington for her postdoctoral studies, she was sharing crayons with one son while nursing the other when she looked up at her husband, and said, “I want to get back into art.”

Celerin, now 46, had always been as creative as she was scientific, but her practical Prague-born parents had explained that in North America, to where the family escaped after the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968, art was not a viable career. Growing up in Ontario, Canada, Celerin demonstrated a youthful mastery of watercolors and oil pastels, but she chose to pursue a Ph.D. that dealt with sex-cell division and DNA repair.

Her husband, also a geneticist, had just received tenure at Indiana University when Celerin made her kitchen-floor declaration nine years ago. “We decided we’d give it a year and see what happened,” she says.

To her great surprise, Celerin far surpassed her goals for that year and has continued to make a livable income every year after. “I never expected to be this successful,” she says, sounding almost apologetic. “I’ve been incredibly lucky.”

The style Celerin developed, which she calls “dimensional weaving,” builds on her early inclination to glue objects to her paintings. “With this technique, I can make my own canvas and incorporate anything I want into it,” she says.

She starts with a nail loom, which is a simple frame on which supporting threads are strung. She weaves a base layer of yarn and may add found objects like seashells, toy soldiers, and slag, a byproduct of smelting. Often, she’ll build outward with needle felting, a technique that allows her to sculpt using wool, some of which she custom dyes using anything from dandelion petals to Kool-Aid.

In keeping with her background in biology, her work interprets the natural world, with motifs like trees, gardens, and animals. Moreover, her weavings capture a brightness that mirrors her happy spirit.

“My life is in a really beautiful stage where there is a lot of comfort and joy,” she says. “My art is me, so it reflects that.”



Martina Celerin with a nail loom in her studio, wearing a scarf she wove.

In the age of digital modeling and 3-D laser printers, working with a hammer and chisel may seem “kind of archaic,” admits stone carver Amy Brier, 51. But it’s precisely this connection to human origins that makes her craft compelling.

“When you look back at history, we understand a lot of it through the stone architecture that’s left,” she says. “Even those early pictographs were a harder rock on another rock picking out a picture. I think that’s why people respond to stone in such a deep way.”

She points out that until the Industrial Revolution stone carving was not only art but also advanced science. Gothic-style cathedrals—like that of St. John the Divine in New York City, on which Brier worked for six years—were the height of technology when they first appeared in the medieval period.

For Brier, this marriage of exacting scientific calculation with the seemingly innate urge to pound on rock makes stone carving uniquely satisfying, especially when she’s working with her favorite medium: Indiana limestone. “I think part of my purpose in life is to elevate Indiana limestone as an artistic medium, to help bring it to more people’s consciousness,” she says.

Brier, a native of Rhode Island, discovered carving while studying abroad in Italy. After training at Studio Sem in Pietrasanta, she went to work on the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in 1987. She came to Bloomington for graduate school when that project ended in 1993. Since finishing her MFA in 1996, she has directed the Indiana Limestone Symposium, a summer workshop she co-founded to offer training and community to both beginners and experienced carvers.

Her architectural work adorns façades from IU’s Simon Hall to The Jewish Museum in New York, and her sculpture can be found in indoor and outdoor areas, from private residences to Indianapolis’ White River Gardens. She has shown in museums around the state and in Austria and Germany. Despite this success, Brier was not able to sustain herself financially with her art alone until she became a full-time instructor at Ivy Tech Community College last year.

“Now I’m sculpting an art program,” she says. “I hope my teaching style is just like my art-making style, where I leave a lot of room for creativity and things that are not anticipated.”



After.

## Amy Brier STONE CARVER

Amy Brier in her studio with *Prague Roliquery*, an interactive sculpture that can be rolled in sand to leave behind an impression.



(left) BFF. (above) *When Life Gives You Lemons...*

# Joel Washington

MUSIC IS HIS MUSE



Joel Washington in front of his Frank Zappa series on display at the Laughing Planet Café.

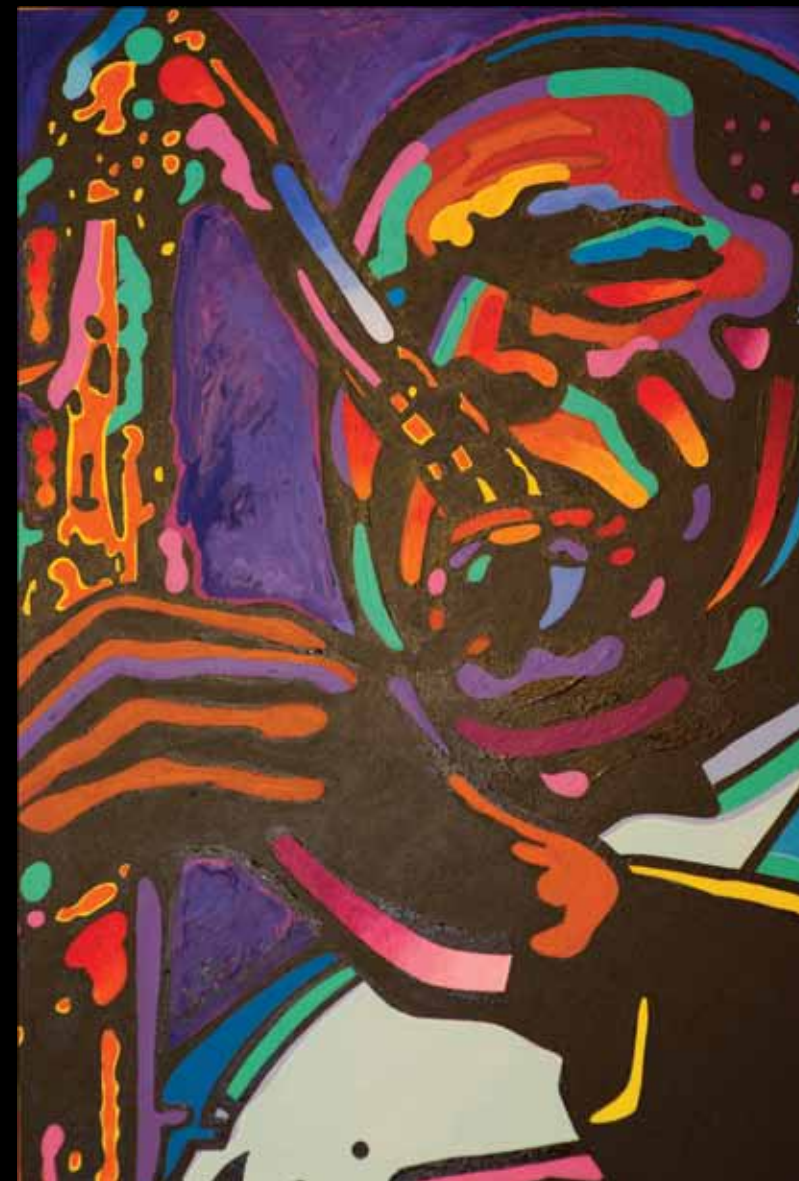
“Often it’s the psychedelic music from the ‘60s that gets me working the colors.”



Washington's *Wes Montgomery* at the Indiana Memorial Union.



(above left) *Untitled*. (above right) Panel No. 9 from the Zappa series. (below) *John Coltrane*.



There are days, says Joel Washington, when he “can’t wait to get home and pick up a dry canvas and just hit it with a paintbrush.” Best known for his portraits of musicians, rendered in vibrantly contrasting colors, the 51-year-old artist works spontaneously, allowing his color choices and background ideas to come to him on the spur of the moment.

“You’ll never see pre-sketches,” he says. “None of it is planned; it’s just as I go along. I always put on music—a lot of jazz, a lot of classics, a lot of psychedelic music. Often it’s the psychedelic music from the ‘60s that gets me working the colors.”

Sixties psychedelia is a running theme for Washington; he traces his aesthetic to the 1968 animated film *Yellow Submarine*, featuring the music of The Beatles. “Even today, it’s like a textbook for me,” he says of the movie. “The ‘Nowhere Man’ sequence and the ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ sequence were what made me want to be an artist.”

He’s been sketching since he saw the movie when he was 12 years old, but it’s only now that the self-taught Washington feels he’s on the brink of making art his full-time occupation. His paintings have been featured in local restaurants, posters, and exhibits, and at the Indiana State Museum, the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, and even the Indiana Memorial Union, where he works as a custodian. This visibility has made him one of the more recognizable artists in Bloomington.

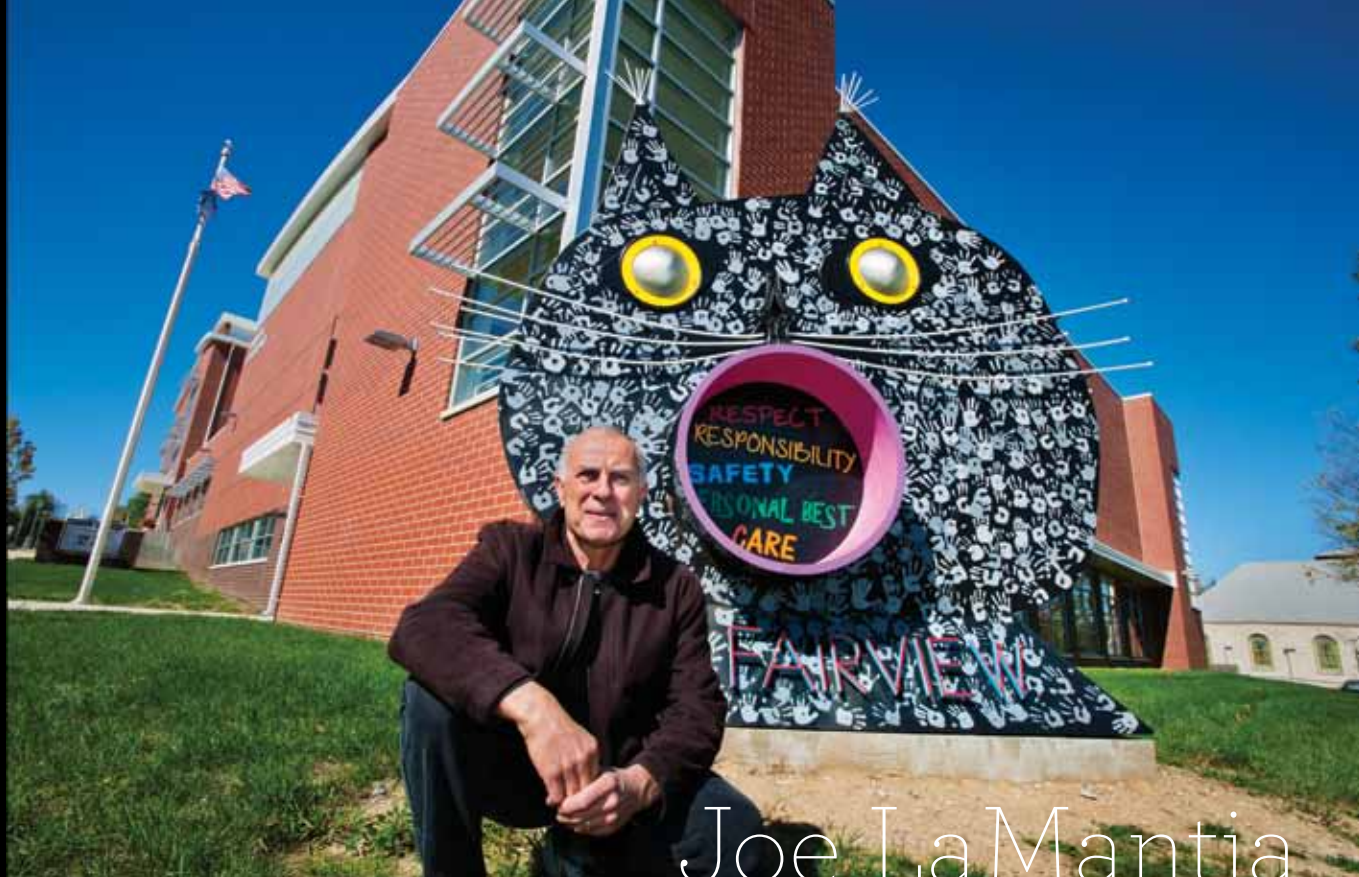
“It’s become almost like a tourist thing,” he says. “People see the Frank Zappa paintings I did for the Laughing Planet Café, and they’ll come up to me [at the Memorial Union], and say, ‘You’re the Zappa guy!’ And I’m like, ‘Yeah, yeah, I gotta sweep.’”

He doesn’t mind the attention, though, especially when it leads to commissions. There hasn’t been a time in the past five years when he hasn’t been working on back-to-back commissioned projects; right now he has eight in the pipeline.

“Eventually it’s leading up to something,” he says. “I can see how a lot of the work I’ve put in is starting to come full circle.”

# Margie Van Auken

JOY IN CREATING



Joe LaMantia

Joe LaMantia with the *Artisticat* outside Fairview Elementary School.

## COMMUNITY ARTIST

Joe LaMantia never knows where he'll be sleeping—amid a sea of dolls, under a four-poster canopy, or in a tiny bunk bed that smells like pee. It's all part of the adventure for this "collaborative artist," who says that staying in a hotel would defeat his purpose of connecting with families and communities through art.

"I want to be open and receptive to having people bring me into the community," says LaMantia, 64, who has worked with more than 100 schools to produce permanent art installations on their grounds. From bell towers to Maypoles to splashing-whale sculptures, he assists children, parents, and school staff in creating art that represents the history and values of their communities.

"It's real important for me to demystify art," he says. "People have been crushed, their creativity crushed. Often by working with children, I can get people to be a child again. I make it a point to say I don't do [school projects] unless I have parents. I want to make the process very inclusive and encourage everyone to participate."

Bloomington has been the site of many such LaMantia-led community projects, including *Animal Island* on the B-Line Trail, *Flyer V Guitar* on the parking garage on 7th Street, *Artisticat* outside Fairview Elementary School, and the *Hidden Jewel* sculpture at Lower Cascades Park. LaMantia is also artist-in-residence at Stone Belt Arc, an organization that provides services and support for individuals with developmental disabilities. He helped develop Stone Belt's signature mixed-media mosaics, and Stone Belt artists provided the designs for *Animal Island* as well as for the gate at Bryan Park Tot Lot playground.

With each project, LaMantia sees his role as that of a facilitator, allowing community members to supply the ideas while he concentrates on bringing them to life. "It's a tricky sort of thing, learning when to come forward and when to fall back; learning how to let something be spontaneous and not try to stop it," he says. "But it keeps things fresh, because ideas always are fresh. Ideas are like a dance party. It's wild, it's an experience, it's unpredictable, and I never know where it's going to take me."



Margie Van Auken sketching in her living room.

(below) Van Auken's illustration for the Coal Country Music CD. (bottom) *Waiting for Lovely*.



(above) *Flying V Guitar*. (right) *Parade Faces*.



"Ever since I could hold a crayon, I drew," says Margie Van Auken, 59, an illustrator and painter. "It's a natural gift that I never take for granted."

Using fine-tipped pens and paintbrushes the size of toothpicks, she creates whimsical, detailed renderings that take several days to complete. Her work centers on themes of natural beauty, often including people and plants and almost always incorporating animals. "I love little critters, you know," she says. "They're like me—impish."

The sign outside the Runcible Spoon restaurant may be the most visible of

Van Auken's paintings, but she has also illustrated numerous logos, campaign materials, and posters, as well as album covers for singer/songwriter Krista Detor, local jug band Garden of Joy (of which her husband Art Heckman is a member), and the Coal Country Music collection featuring Willie Nelson, Bonnie Raitt, and Natalie Merchant.

"Music is a huge inspiration for me," Van Auken says. "It's like my muse or even my food. I need it."

To get her fix, she'll head to the Players Pub, where live music and her sketchbook create the perfect recipe for creativity. On other occasions, she'll come across an antique frame or a beautiful setting that will give her an idea for a painting. "I'm also inspired by emotions," she says. Most of her work reflects her naturally "happy, joyful" state, but certain pieces—like the angel she drew after her husband's brother died—appear heavy with sorrow.

That angel graced the holiday card Van Auken sold that year, an annual tradition she prioritizes to make her work available



at a low price. "I play Robin Hood with the prices a lot," she says.

When she's not sketching or painting, Van Auken can often be found at Time Flies Antique & Art Galleries, where she works part time. Meeting customers in the shop—many of whom ask to see her sketchbook—provides a welcome balance to the time she spends alone on her artwork.

"I like talking to people," she says, "but not every day." ✨

