

Beauty in the Chaos

A hectic creative process defines the style of this always-busy artist

by Jill Duff-Hoppes

When Leslie MacMillan creates art, things tend to get a little chaotic. Fortunately, the Longwood artist is more than OK with that.

Leslie, who is mostly self-taught, specializes in silk painting and batik artwork. Her

artistic process is a complex one that involves many steps, from drawing intricate designs to meticulously hand-painting silk textiles with fabric dyes to achieve the desired result. Things don't always go according to plan, though.

"Silk painting is not the medium for a perfectionist at all, and I am not," Leslie says with a laugh. "It's got this chaos factor, where I don't know what it's going to turn out like until it's done. So it's a surprise for me at the end, and I like those variables. I'm always learning and tweaking and figuring out a new way to play with it, which is fun."

A Seminole County native, Leslie graduated from Lake Mary High School, where she took Advanced Placement art classes. In the late 1990s, a family friend introduced her to the art of silk painting – which is painting on silk fabric instead of on canvas or paper. For the next decade or so, Leslie experimented with silk painting as a hobby, gradually developing her own style. She also took classes in architectural engineering at Seminole State



Leslie with a piece of her artwork that was featured this spring in a Women In the Arts exhibit at the Orlando Public Library



College and worked for her father's real-estate appraisal firm but wanted a more creative professional life.

So, Leslie began focusing more seriously on her textile

artwork. She often takes her silk paintings to another level by also employing the wax batik technique, a process that gives her pieces added texture and rich layers of color and contrast. Her artwork has been exhibited in venues across Central Florida including the Lake Mary

Museum, Orlando Museum of Art, and Osceola Arts.

Many of Leslie's highly detailed paintings depict scenes of nature and wildlife, while others feature elements of fantasy and surrealism. Currently, she is working on a multi-cultural series depicting creation myths from around the globe.

"What I have with the silk paintings is unique," says Leslie, a 41-year-old wife and mother of three. "I'm very passionate about illustration, so what I've tried to do is blend illustrative techniques with textiles and marry those two together."

In late February, Leslie was one of nearly two dozen professional artists invited to participate in the 15th annual



Wekiva Paint Out at Wekiva Island in Longwood. The annual *plein air* art event raises funds for the nonprofit organizations Keep Seminole Beautiful and Wekiva Wilderness Trust, two causes that are dear to Leslie.

“One of the best parts about living in Seminole County is our environment,” says Leslie, who resides in the Springs community, where wildlife sightings are a daily occurrence. “I do feel very passionately that our water and other natural resources are so worthy of being protected.”

Leslie’s work will next be seen in *Earth’s Voice: An Environmental Art Exhibition* by the Central Florida Climate Artists group from May 21 to August 22 at the Orlando Science Center.

Another nonprofit organization that is special to Leslie is Women in the Arts, an Orlando-based group that recognizes the work of female artists and brings art education to the greater community – especially to youth. In March and April, one of Leslie’s silk painting/batik pieces was featured in *Celebrating the Genius of Women*, a 10-year retrospective exhibition presented by Women in the Arts at the Orlando Public Library.

Art has been a key element of Leslie’s life since she was a child, when she spent all her free time doodling and painting. Now, Leslie’s youngest daughter – 10-year-old Apple – is following in her mom’s footsteps.

“I had to give Apple an art desk in my studio because she is constantly painting just like I did when I was a kid. She’s always making something and stealing my art supplies,” Leslie jokes.

After a long hiatus from college, Leslie returned to Seminole State and will graduate in May with an Associate of Arts degree. She recently earned a stage technology technical certificate there and hopes to transfer to the University of Central Florida this fall to study the theatrical disciplines of scenic arts and prop fabrication. Ultimately, Leslie hopes to land a job where she can help create the immersive worlds of the local theme parks. And, she intends to continue working as a textile artist – an endeavor that fulfills her on a personal as well as a professional level.

“Whatever field I’m in,” Leslie says with a smile, “I want to make sure that I’m getting my hands dirty and making things.”



To see more of Leslie’s work, visit LKMArtist.com.

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