



Photo by Arlene Kelley

Inspired by a story about Catholic saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, Kelley painted this illustration of Clare, a young noblewoman who took a vow of poverty and formed the first female religious community, The Order of Poor Ladies, or Poor Clares.

Photo by Michelle Troutman

Arlene Kelley at Bravo's Southwest Bistro in Hallowell in front of the mural she created and restored.

Pittston artist turns her passion into a successful career

Business designs, portraits, book art show off her talent

BY MICHELLE TROUTMAN
Correspondent

Arlene Kelley excels at creating something from nothing, having turned her passion and talent for filling blank canvasses into a successful career.

Her works are as varied as the places where they have been displayed: inside local businesses, in signs, at websites, at a New Hampshire police department, in newspapers and, for the first time, in an upcoming children's book.

Kelley crafts bold, colorful images in a simple style, for everything from logos and marketing materials for businesses to paintings, illustrations and portraits. Depending on the project, she can sketch using a variety of different media, such as oil paint, acrylic paint, chalk and pencil, or computer graphics.

She charges \$50 an hour for commercial graphic design. For creative projects, such as portraits of pets and of people, she offers individual estimates.

Her love of art began in childhood. "I would draw things I saw — my toys, people around me, my family, friends, my dog," Kelley said.

Her mother, Myrna, encouraged her to take a correspondence school art course advertised in a magazine, and oil painting lessons. After high school, Kelley studied fine art at The Portland School of Art and graphic arts production at Central Maine Vocational Technical Institute. These experiences led to stints as a designer at local print shops.

"There was a big demand for graphic artists in the printing industry. It was very exciting to work in a field that was interesting," she said.

Kelley later earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree at The Art Institute of Southern California, and returned to Maine to design ads for The Portland Press Herald and The Maine Sunday Telegram.

Ten years later, she returned to her hometown in Pittston and became a designer at the public relations firm of Nancy Marshall Communications. From her home where she lives with her husband, Danny Baird and their children, Ariana, 8, and Henry, 7, she launched her business, Vivid Art and Design three years ago and began freelancing full-time.

Kelley has passed her artistic passion on to her children, who also draw and paint. "I love everything they create. It amazes me. I taught them a little bit. They haven't done as much lately, but we used to work more with paint, and with drawing media and pastels."

She advises budding artists like her children to "accept challenges and don't take things too personally — all things I've had to learn."

One of her most recognizable works is the colorful Marvel! logo at the State of Maine's Virtual Library website, a project for Nancy Marshall.

With public relations and marketing specialist Sarah Fuller of Fuller Ink, Kelley created the logo for Lakeside Motel and Cottages in Winthrop. Upon seeing the design lit up in front of the business during a car trip, Kelley yelled, startling her fellow passengers. "My husband stepped on the brakes. Everyone in the car went, 'What?' and I said, 'I did that.'"

As a member of The Society of

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Kelley

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Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, Kelley is currently achieving a longtime dream, illustrating a self-published author's children's book. Kelley has written her own children's fiction, too.

One of her pastimes is visiting art museums.

"I used to really love the flower paintings of Georgia O'Keefe. I love art history, and early Christian art," she said.

Kelley said the beauty and meaning behind Renaissance-era artists' focus on realism and attention to detail inspires her. She also admires modern art; the directness of Alex Katz's figurative art, which has its own wing at The Colby College Museum of Art, appeals to her.

"I'm drawn to bright colors and bold, simple designs — things that are fresh and uncomplicated at the same time," she said.

She most enjoys painting with oil. Another of her notable creations is a mural of a desert scene she painted for Bravo's Restaurant in Gardiner before it opened in 1981. Owner Jim Remley had the carpenter who renovated the building make a removable panel for the mural.

"It was exciting and fun, and I actually planned it out and did a small mock-up

painting of it about 24-inches-long beforehand," Kelley said. "I drew it up to scale and reproduced it on the wall."

The mural survived a flood and now hangs in the recently reopened Bravo's Southwest Bistro on Water St. in Hallowell. Kelley repaired the mural, filling in holes, scraping away peeling and worn paint and repainting sections. Her research into art restoration and her experience repairing old paintings and prints for her brother, Guy, an antique dealer, made her feel safe experimenting with it, she said.

Kelley's attention to detail is also apparent in her portraits. "I just have a fascination with portrait art and trying to capture someone's personality and their features."

An intense portrait project featured Greenland, N.H. Police Chief Michael Maloney, who was killed in a drug raid last year, days before his retirement. The portrait now hangs in the police department's patrol room in his memory.

"He was a much loved officer. It was a very meaningful commission for me, and I really wanted to do a good job and give it my best," she said. "I feel very lucky. It still never ceases to amaze me that something I create can have a life of its own."

To contact Arlene Kelley of Vivid Art and Design, email arniedanny@roadrunner.com or call 582-4267. Her website features samples of her work: artistinmaine.com.



Photo by Arlene Kelley

Kelley's drawing of her son, Henry (far right), together with some classmates at his pre-Kindergarten school.



Photo by Arlene Kelley

Kelley's illustration of a baby swan in acrylic paint, a character in a children's book she wrote.

Taking over an established hometown business meant Tawnya Clough had some pretty big shoes to fill. Tapping into the hometown bank made the process easier, particularly when it came to helping craft a custom financing package that works for everyone.

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