

# Marianna McDonald: TRAN



*"Joy's Drive" 7x9 Pastel Drawing*

*By Ellen Everman Deaton*

If you're a collector of Kentucky images and looking for a new perspective on our Commonwealth, a state that naturally abounds in panoramic hill-top views and pastoral landscapes; if you long to be transported into sun-flushed fields and entrancing vistas of intoxicating light and color; if you're seeking out the artist who has a fresh eye and who can conjure up the, at once, real and dreamy with roots that might very well go back to one of the great French Impressionists, then meet Marianna McDonald.

# TRANSFORMATIVE IMAGES



"Sharp's Farm Mingo Road Evening Light" 10x32 Pastel Drawing

Many of us know the engaging Louisville native from her rural scenes, comic cows (they always make me think of the children's poem "I've Never Seen a Purple Cow") and nature-defying color. She promotes her art at the Kentucky Crafted: The Market and at numerous shows throughout the state and beyond. For those of us interested enough, she'll explain her process which is fascinating, there is no doubt. She describes how she layers pastels to get just the perfect hue and her method of applying turpentine oil washes first for the underpainting, then layers of pastels. She can tell us about the sanded textured paper she uses or the pastel primer which has pumice in the colored gesso to create a different type of textured look. It's interesting to note how she applies the lightest colors with values that support the center point of focus as her final step in the image-making process. But do we really know the mental process—the genius, if you will—that presents itself miraculously on canvas? For that matter, do we know any artist of genius magnitude? By knowing an artist, I specifically mean this: From whence does it all come? In Marianna's case, I want to know what is the essence of her stroke, how does she conjure the blues, the violets, the purples lying deeply in the shadows when all the casual observer might see are grays and browns? How does she frame the image and, at the same time, seize upon its special qualities? I suppose it doesn't matter. Marianna creates the images and we are left only to wonder. How? Why? And then we simply give in to the stunning beauty that is her gift to us. If we're lucky, we can drop into the world that is Marianna's, have a look-see and imprint it into our consciousness—a delightful trinket waiting for us in the wings when we call for it, when our soul longs to take solace from something as evanescent as her silky rivers or her pastoral road scenes darkened by long shadows recalling our own memories of feelings, if not sight.

To a great extent, her most recent rural pieces are products

of her new love...plein air painting. This simply means painting outside in order to capture quickly the quality of light or shadows at any given time. Marianna says she loves..."capturing that exact moment in time." She feels the camera doesn't have the power to bring it all into the studio for a later painting because it doesn't capture the nuances revealed to the naked eye. So plein air is now her preferred method. Once the plein air painting is done and it's back to the studio for touch-ups, Marianna doesn't like to change too much as it takes away from the "freshness of the piece." Marianna loves..."sun and shadow as it defines the lay of the land." And she likes being there when it all happens, when it all comes together in a way that pleases her artistic eye. But she's clever enough to not get trapped into copying nature and not finding something of herself to say about the experience. Aha?



Marianna plein air painting.



"Ginkgo Trees" 10x8 Oil Painting

Marianna's Elkhorn Creek on the cover is only a small glimpse into the mysterious spectrum of her palette and its outward longing which, perhaps, represents her interior world as best as anything can. Mirror images of woods falling from above into the calm waters coax our attention and leaves float deliberately at water's surface to add interest. Her Swift Camp Creek Path informs the viewer that delight has been taken in the shadows of the trees. Notice the violets hazing into the greens. And here also are her long shadows which are an oft-repeated theme—one of my favorite characteristics of her pastels. In Catalpa Street in Chevy Chase there is evidence of a broad stroke that feels as if it yearns for a different signature stamp. An evolutionary step? Her Pisgah Pike Triumvirate: "Evening



"North Elkhorn Sycamore" 8x12 Pastel Drawing

Light", "Railroad Crossing Ahead", and "Trees" might be the most enlightening of pastels by Marianna where it seems the purples and violets might spring from some spiritual vision. It's the subtle color in so much of Marianna's work that, perhaps, we would never see without her special transformative power. It is this that holds our attention the most. In Marianna's pastels, it is always the color.

Marianna started painting when she was thirteen through the encouragement of her mother for whom she credits her career. Paint-by-numbers got her started. Then she graduated to an oil painting set with "Walter Foster Learn to Paint" books that eased her into the real world of painting. Later she took her art degree from Murray State University graduating in 1971. In 1983, when she began taking her children out on sketching trips, she decided to change her medium of art from oils to pastels in an effort to streamline and bring safety to her efforts. Carolyn Hisel was her best influence, Marianna explains, because she showed her how



"Swift Creek Camp Path" 22x28 Pastel Drawing

paints can be expressive and not just representative. "She said to paint with your heart and not just your eyes and I always remember that," says Marianna, with no one doubting her for a moment. Nationally-known, Wolf Kahn is another influence who also works in both pastel and oils. Asked how long it took to arrive at her style, Marianna humbly admits her pastel style is always evolving. Her new plein air work, she says, is promoting that evolution that she desires. Those collecting Marianna's art hail from Danville to Cincinnati to Louisville. One collector now owns 19 to 20 of her animal drawings which are Marianna's lighter, more comic pieces. Who are Marianna's favorite artists? Carolyn Hisel and Chris Segre-Lewis who are represented by Ann Tower. Nationally, she loves Susan Ogilvie and Richard McKinley, pastel artists from Washington State.

Marianna's art can be found at the following galleries: Main Cross and Fayette Galleries in Lexington, Edenside in Louisville, Row House Gallery in Cincinnati and Liz-Beth

& Company Gallery in Knoxville. If you'd like to drop in on Marianna at your ease, visit her at <http://mcdonaldfineartblog.blogspot.com/> or stop by her booth at any number of art shows throughout the state.



### About the Author:

Ellen is author of, *Pink Dice*, her debut novel set in a 1950s Northern Kentucky/Cincinnati. A native of Kentucky and graduate of the University of Cincinnati, Ellen is a free-lance writer who enjoys, critiques and writes about the arts and politics in the state of Kentucky and Ohio. Visit her website at [www.pinkdicenovel.com](http://www.pinkdicenovel.com)

