

WAKE Living

APEX CARY FUQUAY-VARINA GARNER HOLLY SPRINGS KNIGHTDALE MORRISVILLE RALEIGH ROLESVILLE RTP WAKE FOREST WENDELL ZEBULON

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AWARDS ISSUE

Nicole Kennedy

PAINTING STORIES WITH ATTITUDE BY ALICE OSBORN

Nicole Kennedy's brain is on overload all the time thinking about what to paint next—could it be patrons chatting outside at the restaurant a few doors down from Kennedy's studio on Person Street in downtown Raleigh? Or could it be a bluebird landing on a telephone wire? Kennedy is known for painting beach scenes and boats, and it's no secret that being around water is her true love. She quips, "I'll never move to the mountains."

Like the subjects in her oil paintings, the award-winning artist is perpetually in motion working on her next art project, traveling to Europe, and learning Italian. She is curious and fascinated by the world around her, and has used every bit of her past work and life experience as research and development for her current art career.

AN ARTIST'S BEGINNINGS

Growing up in New Canaan, Connecticut, Kennedy was naturally inclined toward art and creativity. She started drawing at four years old because her brother's best friend was an excellent draftsman and would show off his skills at the kitchen table. Her mother had been trained as an artist, but didn't pursue it. Her father was an art lover and collector who represented illustrators for commercial work. She and her mother frequently visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and young Nicole was particularly fascinated by the Egyptian section.

"My parents had fashion magazines lying around the house, and so I practiced my drawing from studying the models. I can't remember a time I didn't draw with pencils, Magic Markers, and ink," she says. In high school, Kennedy's art teacher

influenced her to switch her style from traditional to contemporary, and she soon became a regular visitor at MoMA and at the Whitney Museum of American Art. This art teacher later became an abstract and cutting edge artist in SoHo.

After graduating from the Parsons School of Design in Manhattan, Kennedy sought a career in art, but one that didn't focus on the canvas. She wanted to be a fashion illustrator like the ones who delighted her as a child when she would pore over the illustrated evening gowns from Saks Fifth Avenue and Macy's. "I knew I needed to make money if I wanted to live in Manhattan. My dad had a restaurant in New York City with a brownstone above it, and so he rented me an apartment in his brownstone. I went to the School of Visual Arts at night for advertising and that was my career from age twenty-two

to forty. I ended up becoming a successful art director doing TV storyboards and filming commercials," she says. During this time when she wasn't working at four different ad agencies, Kennedy painted with watercolors.

MOVING TO RALEIGH AND THE FOUNDING OF NICOLE'S STUDIO & ART GALLERY

After Nicole Kennedy met her soon-to-be husband, Parker (a native of Raleigh), who sold wine to restaurants, she moved back to Connecticut with him. In 1996 they moved to Raleigh to launch Parker's Italian restaurant dream: Caffé Luna on the corner of Blount and Hargett Streets in downtown Raleigh. Kennedy couldn't find a job in advertising, but the new restaurant desperately needed art. "I started to paint again and that's how it all started,"



ARTIST PROFILE



she explains. Kennedy took classes from famous artists from around the country to hone her skills, and then thought, “Wow, we can do this in Raleigh. My art started to sell in the restaurant and I wanted a studio outside of my home. I invited other artists to join me and soon became an art dealer.”

Like themselves a few years before, Raleigh welcomed more and more transplants, and her business, Nicole’s Studio & Art Gallery, grew. Every wall is on wheels because Nicole’s Studio is a gallery that also hosts nationally acclaimed art instructors who teach. “This aspect of our business model put us on this dual front and transformed us into a different kind of place to go,” she says.

“RELATE TO THE ATTITUDE OF THE MOMENT”

After almost two decades, Nicole’s Studio thrives because of dedication, talent, and quality. Kennedy knows the tastes of her art-buying customers, and her workshops are taught by renowned artists in their respective mediums. Success feeds back into itself since the workshop artists make great clients: after their classes they become pickier about what art they buy, which is, of course, their instructors’ art that is displayed in the studio. Many of her students have gone on to notable art careers. “When you take workshops you need to come home and approach the painting that’s distinct to you and not like everyone else; this really can’t be taught.”

She notes, “Some people are art buyers and some aren’t; many galleries have consistent art buyers that are committed to one gallery and want that gallery to do well, very much like restaurants.” Many of her

clients live in North Raleigh, Cary, Wilmington, and Maryland.

However, tastes vary among age and gender. Millennials seem to lean toward contemporary art which can include figures if painted more stylized or abstractly. A lot of their decisions are monetary at this stage in their lives. In addition, subjects without their faces showing leads to better sales. “Selling figure work is tricky because full-faced figures usually won’t be sold unless the buyer personally knows the model. I have my models turn their heads so they can’t be identified.” Couples have different views about what hangs on their walls. Kennedy notes that sometimes a husband takes a painting on trial, but later finds out his wife can’t live with a girl holding a wine glass with attitude. Conversely, another wife is hoping her husband will buy that same painting for their anniversary. She laughs. “My paintings have a lot of attitude in them.”

Kennedy happily embraces technology, while still challenging herself with oils. Her beach people are captured via a point and shoot camera as she looks for the “painting waiting to happen” and then approaches the painting of her realistic subject without making it look like a photo. For the future, Kennedy wants to continue to teach and paint, but perhaps not hang the art since that is a physical strain for her. She’s been taking on more commissions lately. Her first



one was created for Bev’s Fine Art event exhibit Arts Collide and used to promote the “Peter Pan & Wendy” performance at Burning Coal Theater in Raleigh this past December.

“I paint to get my ideas out into the world. I want people to relate to the girl in the surf, or the nostalgic drawing of a man in uniform who happens to be my father. It’s not really the uniform, but the distinct attitude of a World War II soldier, the Greatest Generation, now lost. I want them to be able to relate to the attitude of the moment.”

Nicole Kennedy established Nicole’s Studio & Art Gallery in 2000 carrying art from both national and North Carolina artists. She loves to paint all subjects from faces to figures, scenic cityscapes, and definitely anything coastal. Kennedy lives in Raleigh with her husband, restaurateur Parker Kennedy of Caffé Luna. Take a workshop and discover Nicole Kennedy’s art for yourself by visiting www.nicolestudio.com.

Alice Osborn is the Editor of Wake Living magazine. You can find out more about Alice’s book coaching, music, and poetry by visiting www.aliceosborn.com.

All images by Nicole Kennedy.

Our Cover Artist: Nicole Kennedy

Nicole Kennedy is a popular painter and art educator. She founded Nicole's Studio & Art Gallery in 2000, which



represents numerous artists and hosts national workshops. In July 2017, Nicole was the featured artist in

Wrightsville Beach Magazine, and that same year she was awarded Signature Member in the American Impressionist Society. She has appeared in national and regional publications such as *Southern Living*, *American Art Collector*, and *The News & Observer*. Born in Connecticut, she worked in advertising in New York City for 17 years. Nicole is proud to call Raleigh home. Find out more about Nicole Kennedy, her studio, and her art at www.nicolestudio.com.