

THIS SPREAD:
Colors of Cathedral



OPEN PORTFOLIO JEN FARNSWORTH



Like so many before her, Jen Farnsworth heard Sedona's siren song while on vacation and, years later, finally answered it when she and her husband returned with all of their possessions loaded onto a moving truck. After years in the corporate world, Jen's intention was to focus on her art here in Red Rock Country. In short order, she met one of her neighbors, sculptor Kim Kori, who urged Jen to apply for a job selling art at Rowe Fine Art Gallery. Jen went to work for the gallery at the end of 2015. Less than two months later, after seeing Jen's high-quality art cards, gallery owners Ken and Monica Rowe invited Jen to join their roster of artists. "I probably started crying," says Jen. She returned to Rowe Gallery a couple of days later with three oil paintings, two of which sold the very next day. "I thought, This can't be happening," says Jen, sitting at a table in her Uptown home with her rescue pug, Teddy, at her feet. "Some of the best days of my life have happened at that gallery." Now, Jen works at the gallery two days a week and spends the other five days painting the wildlife and landscapes that are literally in her own backyard. To see more of Jen's work, visit Rowe Fine Art Gallery (336 AZ-179 at Tlaquepaque Arts & Crafts Village; 928-282-8877) or check the gallery's website at www.rowegallery.com.

SEDONA MONTHLY: Your career as a painter isn't your first career. Tell us where you began.

JEN: I always felt like an artist. I was drawing and painting out in nature, even when I was a kid. I was inspired by nature, but I didn't know how to become a "real artist." I always did creative things, though. I gravitated toward helping people and finding a way to do things differently – I think that was the artist in me. So I worked in marketing and public relations. I enjoyed working for nonprofits. I went to the University of Southern Maine – I'm from Maine originally. I majored in political science. I loved politics, and at that time I think I thought I was going to be president [laughs]. By the end of college, I was so disillusioned with politics that I lost the sense that anything was possible. The idealism I had was gone. One of my favorite jobs was working as an admissions officer for a small college in Maine. One of the great things about the college was that it had this incredible art gallery with a beautiful collection that included works by masters like van Gogh and Monet. It was so inspiring. I always found ways to enjoy my art. As I was teaching myself to paint, van Gogh's *Iris* was on exhibit. I love van Gogh. I studied that painting, and then I painted it. That was 35 years ago. I went on to work for the state chamber of commerce in Maine. I worked in the cable industry and then moved to Boston to work for that chamber of commerce. When I wanted to do something closer to my heart, I started working for the New England Aquarium heading up their corporate relations program. I was there for 11 years.

Were you still painting during this time?

That was a time when I was so engaged in my work that I wasn't painting. I painted when I worked in Maine. That's when I started doing art shows. I probably painted [more than] 100 paintings – there were paintings in my closet, under the bed. Everybody I knew had my art. When I think back on things that have encouraged my art, I remember an art-in-the-park show that I did in Portland [Maine]. It had been a really long day, and I hadn't sold anything. This fella came up and looked at my paintings. He said, 'Well, some people know a little about art, but I'm going to tell you that I know a lot about art. There are a lot of people here who are technically much better than you, but I'm telling you that what you are doing is real art, and you need to keep doing it. And I hope you'll listen to me.' I always carried that with me. He saw something in my work. You always question yourself, and I did because I tend to push the boundaries with color. I've always had a supportive family, though. When you have somebody championing you – especially when you're trying to do something creative – it's very encouraging.

What brought you to Sedona?

I first came here in 1994. I absolutely loved it. It was like no place I'd ever been. It's a special, special place. When I was at the aquarium, I met the man who would be my husband. We started coming here on vacations. Each year that we came, the sense that we needed to be here got stronger. We didn't know if we could make it happen. We probably should have stayed in Boston for a couple of more years, but we made the move in 2014 with the intent that I would focus on my art.

How has your art changed since you've been in Sedona? Has the subject matter changed?

I've always had a great love for nature and wildlife. I was thrilled because I knew I was going to get to see lizards up close. I'm a real reptile nut. You would think growing up in rural Maine that I would have lots of experiences being close to wildlife but not like Sedona. Here you can

become so connected with the landscape and the history and the wisdom of our ancients and the wildlife. The connection I've developed with the wildlife in my own backyard has been so inspirational. What really began to transform my art was being invited to join Rowe Fine Art Gallery. The fact that they liked my work gave me such confidence – it was so powerful. But even more than that, painting outside transformed my art. There is something about the air here – the clarity and intensity of the sun and the colors. When people come into the gallery and my art gets their attention, it's the colors that they comment on. I want to convey my joy when I'm painting and the connectedness with my subjects. I know most of the subjects that I paint, and I hope that a bit of that comes through in the art. People will say they've never seen colors so intense. They want to know what I'm doing to my paint [laughs].

Tell us about this personal relationship you have with your subject matter.

I have always enjoyed sitting and observing nature. If you observe individuals long enough and carefully enough in the quiet, the miracle of nature opens itself to you. For example, when we first moved here, we saw a spiny lizard on the carport. I would sit quietly and wait for him to come out and sunbath. Every day I'd work to get a little closer. I watched him and got to know his personality. I named him Homer, and his wife was Marge. They were here for a long time, and they were such characters. I've gotten to know the deer that come into the backyard. I've painted the bobcat who comes around. He's a little antagonist. One day he came and looked in our front door.

Does that mean you've been familiar with every animal that you've painted?

Almost. Sometimes I want to paint someone I don't know, so I'll get photos, but it's helpful if I've observed them and know their personality. I take tons of pictures and think about who the animal is. That helps me choose colors and backgrounds. With certain animals – like deer and bunnies – it's great to see them when they are at peace. My favorite bunny to paint was Mischief. My husband and I have done wild bunny rescue and rehab. The hardest part is releasing them because there are so many predators around. We had two little bunnies that we had nursed back to health – literally bottle-fed them – and released them. We called them Mischief and Hiding Out. Mischief had such a curious personality. When we released them, they stayed around. Mischief was here for two-and-a-half years. I've painted her numerous times. But you start to appreciate what a struggle it is for these animals to survive. When you see them in moments of quiet, it's wonderful because so much of their life is not that. It's nervousness and anxiety. I love to capture those quiet moments with my art.

Let's talk about your use of color.

Every creative spirit gravitates toward certain things, and color has always been huge for me.

You mostly use primary colors. Is there a particular artist who inspired that?

I drew a lot of inspiration from van Gogh, Picasso, Robert Daughters, Jeff Ham and John Nieto. They gave me permission to be as bold as I wanted to be, even though sometimes my work is really bright.

But what's interesting with your art is that your mind doesn't necessarily process that it's looking at a blue coyote. It notices the color and then the figure as if they are separate entities.

Everyone says that. Usually I do a few sketches and play around with dif-



OPPOSITE PAGE:
The Lookout

THIS PAGE:
*Mischief on the Red
Rocks*







THIS SPREAD:
Velvet Majesty

ferent colors, but once I get started, things evolve on their own as they often do with art. I like capturing expressions or movements that I've seen. That's important to me. I want to capture a moment correctly and use color to convey the spirit of the animal. I feel the same when I'm painting landscapes.

Observing in nature must take up as much time as sitting at the easel.

Yes. Almost every day, I'm outside watching. I see animals every day.

Is there a big difference between the work you were creating in Maine and the work you create in Arizona?

There are some similarities. Color has always been a part, but developing the colors and the characters of the animals I paint has changed. I'm also coming into my own with the comfort level of my paintings and with a style that feels like my own.

Were you nervous about getting back into it after taking so much time off?

I did paint a little in Boston, mostly as gifts for people, and I was also drawing with ink and graphite. I was a little nervous getting back into oil painting. Oil is a very special medium, so I was excited to go into it full force. Every day I wasn't working, I was painting all day. It felt great, but it was a little scary.

You knew you wanted to focus on your art in Sedona, but what was your end game? Was it a hobby or did you intend to sell it?

I just wanted to see what happened. I didn't think about selling per se, I just knew I needed to do my art. I didn't have the confidence to think about selling.

Sedona was a great move for you.

I think we look back at our lives as we get older and realize we've had different chapters. It's exciting to think that a really exciting chapter can happen at any stage of your life. The creative spirit is such a powerful motivator, and it expresses itself in so many different ways.

From what I understand, there's a big demand for your work right now.

We had a lovely couple come into Rowe Gallery, and they own a gallery in Scottsdale. They want to represent my work, so I'm working hard to come up with enough paintings to make that happen. I'm not a fast painter. Maybe someday I will be. I usually have three or four paintings going at the same time.

Now that you're represented by a gallery and you have this newfound confidence, what are your goals for your art?

I look forward to painting bigger and bolder. I will never be able to paint enough coyotes – that is the magic animal of the Southwest. The coyote that I frequently paint is Don Coyote. He is a permanent resident of Runnin' W Wildlife Center in Cornville. So coyotes and bunnies and deer will always be a focus. I want to do ravens and roadrunners and hummingbirds. I'm working on a javelina. I want to continue with my landscapes because those push the envelope. I'm trying to capture the energy that's here and the almost mystical feel of our landscapes and the intensity. This journey has just started, and I'm excited to see where it's going to go.

What are you trying to communicate with your art?

My greatest hope is that people make a personal connection with the art and see something that resonates with them. If it's the bit of joy I felt with the animal or if it's the animal's spirit, I hope they personally connect with it. I want to hit that chord and create something that's not just meaningful to me but has a broader connection. •