

A Gentle Spirit / Theresa Shelton

Shelton was born in South Carolina while her father was stationed at the Charleston naval base, but most of her youth was spent on the family farm in central Kentucky. There she spent time playing with her brothers and cousins, building make believe forts in the woods, wading in her grandpa's creek, fishing, and riding horses. Working on the farm taught her responsibility but also endeared her to the outdoors. Since she was the oldest child (and only girl), she garnered the title of official tractor driver, leaving her brothers to the heavier work.



Experiencing rural life fostered a loving connection with the land, its peaceful places and wild things, a connection that shows throughout Shelton's work.



A passion for art began early in Theresa's life. As a child she could entertain herself with crayons and paper for hours. Her stay-at-home mother, who is artistic herself, still treasures her childhood sketches of bunnies with very long necks.

After starting school, Theresa's self-esteem turned downward when emphasis was put on how well students could play sports.

'Many times I came home from school with head hung low and tears in my eyes after being picked last for the 'sport of the day' being played at recess. My skill in sports was sorely lacking then and still is today.'

Theresa's mother realized she needed to nurture the interest in art that was developing in her daughter. At age 10, Shelton received a Jon Gnagy drawing set for Christmas. The pages of the workbook quickly became worn as she followed the step by step lessons. In the 7th grade, she won her first artistic award for a watercolor painting of the family cat, an award that gave her a feeling of accomplishment and self-worth. That simple start has taken her on a life long journey as an artist.

Shelton started accompanying her mother to art group meetings in the next county as she eagerly waited to begin high school. *'I could hardly wait to start high school, which meant real art classes.'*

Theresa remembers selling her first charcoal drawings in high school of popular teen idols like Bobby Sherman and Keith Partridge for \$5. That money was used to buy new sketchbooks and pencils. She wished that art classes would last all day. But Shelton's art teacher was unsuccessful at coaxing her into furthering her formal education by applying for an art scholarship to attend Purdue University in Indiana.

'Art was my passion, but by the senior year I was burned out on school, couldn't imagine moving away from home and didn't want to study the 'do as you feel' abstract movement which was so prevalent at that time.'

Instead, she attended a summer oil painting class conducted by German artist Maria Simmons at the local college and continued taking private lessons at Simmons' home until the following spring. Then she pestered the owners of a local greenhouse business until they hired her for spring transplanting. Theresa experienced her first public job. She loved having her hands in the dirt. It was like the farm she grew up on except under plastic.

'It was amazing how I connected with and used the knowledge of design, color and texture in arranging cactus gardens, terrariums and mixed planters.'



When Theresa's indoor farming job ended that summer, she moved on to work as an airline reservationist at the nearby Fort Knox Military post. It didn't take her long to miss being outside and in her jeans. The next spring she was happily back working at the greenhouse and was hired full time.

Theresa married Tim Shelton in 1978 and the following year the young couple took over the greenhouse business from the retiring owners. But even as an active business owner, Theresa was never far from her easel. With Tim's encouragement and support, she continued to study and hone her artistic talent.



'All Stacked Up' oil 9x12

'I would setup a still life at the workbench and paint from life during the slow season.'

Collecting art books and videos on a variety of mediums and styles, she learned from a host of excellent artists. Richard Schmid, Emile Gruppe, Helen Van Wyke and Joyce Pike were just some of her instructors. Shelton recalls, *'taking a sick day from the greenhouse meant lying on the couch, snuggled in a blanket and taking an art class. It would usually take me three tries to watch all of a video because I'd fall asleep during parts. Thank goodness for replay.'*

After exploring several mediums over the years, she kept coming back to the blendable and slow drying oils as her favorite. A style of impressionistic realism with a soft touch was developing. She took up photography in order to have original reference material and firsthand knowledge of her subjects. Shelton continued to enter art competitions and amassed an impressive collection of awards along the way.

Theresa realized early on that she saw colors differently from others. Her diagnosis was confirmed during an eye exam with her optometrist. *'He smiled and asked if I knew how unusual it was for a woman to be color blind. It sure explained a lot of disagreements on color that I had with mom over the years. When applying for jury status into the Kentucky Guild of Artists, my mentor asked why there was no red in my paintings. So I had to change my approach to color. Switching to a limited palette seemed to be the answer. It forced me to learn how to mix the hues I needed and the results were more harmonious. Now red gets squeezed out on my palette and USED.'*



'Sun Streams' oil 12x16

Focusing on the light rather than worrying about getting the colors just right became Shelton's objective.

Displaying and selling her paintings among the yard art in their garden shop gave Theresa a sense of validation as an artist. On occasions, Shelton would steal time away from the business to attend workshops by regional and national instructors. A watercolor workshop by Gerald Brommer focused on design and interpretation of the landscape. Robert Hoffman, an accomplished oil and pastel artist, introduced Shelton to plein air painting. And Charles Gruppe taught her to loosen up with wet-in-wet technique. During a local workshop Mr. Hoffman stopped by to view Theresa's paintings on display in the garden shop. A week later, a personalized note arrived in the mail. Mr. Hoffman wrote how impressed he was with Shelton's work, and he considered it already at a professional level. That note is among her prized memorabilia.

Theresa's interest grew in plein air painting and she enjoyed taking trips with other artists through parts of the United States, Spain and



Portugal, perfecting her newly developed skills. Her travels opened up a new way of experiencing the world around her. Shelton's exhibit in Spain sold out and paid for the trip.

In 1993, Shelton received an invitation to meet with a handful of local artists, and together they formed the Central Kentucky Art Guild in which she continues to be a juried member. The fellowship with other artists pushed her to broaden the scope of her abilities. In 1995, she applied and became a juried/exhibiting participant in the KY Crafted Program 'The Market' sponsored by the Kentucky Arts Council. In coming years, she also juried into regional art fairs such as 'Summer Fair' in Cincinnati, Ohio.



'Cool Shimmers', oil 36x36

After moving friends to Florida in the early 90's the Sheltons longed to have a retirement home there some day. In 2003, they bought an older home in North Fort Myers, a sunny retreat from the cold and gloomy Kentucky winters. At first, Theresa looked at the new tropical surroundings, comparing the expansive flatness to her beloved rolling hills of Kentucky, and didn't know where to start. Even the sun was different.



'Winged Affair' oil 36x24

'It took a while for me to start seeing with new eyes and find subject matter that was exciting. The beauty of Florida's quiet places and nature crept into my paintings. It has been an evolution.'

Health issues threw a wrench into the couple's lives in 2005. A staph infection formed after orthoscopic surgery on Tim's knee. Refusing to let the doctors remove his leg, eight surgeries followed over the next 12 months. With the help of friends and family, Theresa took charge of the business and home, leaving little time for art. After his recovery, Tim tried, but was unable, to keep up with the strenuous work of the greenhouse. His knee replacement broke and more surgeries followed. So after 35 years, they made the difficult decision to close the greenhouse portion of the business. A negative turned into a positive, freeing the couple up to spend more time in Florida, and Theresa was able to focus more on her art. She built up enough inventory to seek out gallery representation in Florida.

The artistic side of Theresa had been waiting for this moment. Knowledge and time have come together in her studio to enable her to see what she can accomplish next.

'It wouldn't take much for me to become a hermit. I am so content pushing paint around in the studio that I can forget to connect to the outside world. Each canvas is a new challenge and with each new challenge, I learn even more.'

Tim pitches in with cooking, laundry and errands so she can spend more time in the studio. He gladly accompanies her and carries photo or painting equipment on trips to find new inspiration.



Shelton maintains studios in Vine Grove, KY and N. Fort Myers, FL. Her work has been included in exhibits across the Midwest and Southeast United States and abroad. It is also represented by several fine art galleries.

In 2014, 'Sunrise Sentinel' oil 24x24 was accepted into the prestigious Oil Painters of America Eastern Regional Show.



"Creating is something I have to do! It's part of who I am."

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