



Living the Dream: Ordinary Inspirations The Unique Perspective of Provincetown Artist Katherine Fenwick

by Katie O'Sullivan

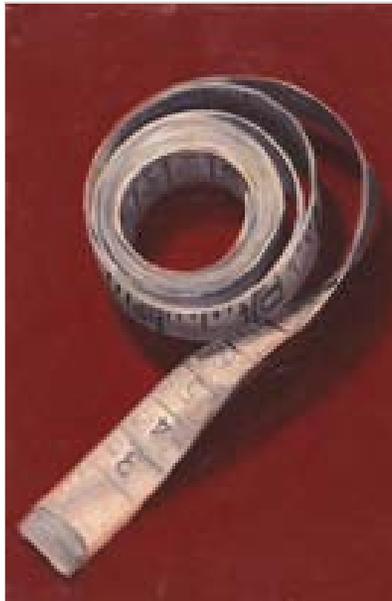


If you follow the yellow arrow off Commercial Street, just before the Thanassi Gallery, you will be led down a cobbled, perennial-lined path that bends around a corner to the Fenwick Gallery.

No larger than a living room, yet bathed in personality, Katherine Fenwick's working studio exhibits the humor and the talent of an artist who finds her inspiration in the simplest of objects.

"I'm serious about painting," Katherine explains, "but I'm not always a serious person." One of her most popular collections, entitled Junk Drawer Paintings, sold very well over the summer. "It started when I was in the middle of a huge, serious painting. To relax, I started dashing off these little works."

The small oils highlight a single object against the same red background. "I'd go into friends' homes and open up their drawers to see what was in them. All these paintings are from stuff taken from actual junk drawers around town."



Junk Drawer Paintings - Tape Measure

"My situation is like a zillion other artists," she adds. "You have to work so much to make a living that you don't have time to do art."

Last winter, however, she decided to finally make the leap and make the time. The Fenwick Studio & Gallery threw their Grand Opening gala on June 17th featuring Katherine's paintings and the works of four other artists.

"The gallery space was offered to me; it kind of just fell into my lap," she recalls. "I had this opportunity and I took it, and I'm glad that I did."

Growing up in Louisville, Kentucky, Katherine spent the first thirty years of her life in the Midwest. She earned her BFA at the University of Louisville, and then her MFA at Oklahoma University. After graduate school, she headed for the East coast, spending eight years in New York City.

Katherine was making art and working at galleries, and for the last four years of her time in NYC she ran a conservation frame shop that was popular with big name galleries. "The art scene came to me through the shop," Katherine says with a laugh.

So how did she get to Provincetown?

"There was this girl who had the loft next to mine in New York, and her family was from P-town," explains Katherine. "She would spend her summers in P-town; she had a fishing shack here. I visited her for four or five years, spending fun summer weekends on the Cape. Then she got a grant to winterize her shack, with the provision that she live here year round. So I decided to visit her at Christmastime."

While Katherine was on the Cape for Christmas that year, an apartment "fell into" her lap. "I was thinking already about leaving the City – I was pretty much done with city life – so when this happened, I went back and gave three months notice at my job and just moved. It wasn't planned. I just moved."

Katherine had only been in Provincetown for a year when her mother died. She started spending her winters back in Louisville, managing rental properties, and spending the summer months working at a Provincetown restaurant. This went on for another eight years.

"I was getting further and further away from my art," she laments. "Then I had the opportunity – it came up last winter – to get this studio space and open my own gallery. I knew I had to get out of the restaurant business. When I was younger, I would have been more scared. But I was ready."

Katherine's favorite medium is oils, and her classical training is evident in the realistic tone of her artwork. Most of her pieces focus on everyday objects, elevating simple things like paper towels and Dixie cups in the traditional style of still-life painting.



Love Me Tender, Oil on Panel

"I grew up poor, and this was my life," Katherine explains. "I didn't have fine china or fancy flowers for still-life practice. Instead, I found interesting things to paint, and loved to bring life to objects that are really ordinary."

Although her gallery is somewhat hidden from the bustle of Commercial Street it is well worth the detour. "It's not the greatest spot for foot traffic," Katherine admits, and despite her first summer being a blur of activity it didn't pan out financially.



The Artist at Work

"Having my own studio/gallery felt great, but it's too much for one person," she says, her usual humor giving way to a more serious tone. "You can't be an artist and run a gallery by yourself. At least, I can't."



Fenwick Studio & Gallery, 234 Commercial Street, Provincetown

Fenwick

Studio & Gallery

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This doesn't mean that Katherine is giving up on her dream. She is adjusting it.

Embracing the spirit of resiliency, Katherine plans to keep the studio space and share it with only one other artist, instead of showcasing and selling works by many other artists. "I've worked in galleries before and I like working in a gallery," she explains, accepting that she found it too hard to run the gallery space and still find enough time to paint. "I don't have the capital to go on this way."

Katherine is realistic about her options, facing obstacles with a combination of humor and tenacity. "I'll still be there (at the studio) to make art and to make sales, but I needed to pare down. And I needed to get another job to pay the bills."

She's now working at another, more established gallery, and laughs as she adds, "They say it takes three years to be established, develop a client base, get the hang of advertising... to make yourself a destination stop."

With a summer of networking and self-promotion behind her, Katherine is optimistic about her future. "I made a lot of great connections this summer, and things are opening up for me. I'm much happier now."

Like the subjects she paints, Katherine is pursuing her dream within the confines of living in the real world. "I feel like I'm getting my life back on track," she says. "But you just can't do that overnight, unless you have a ton of money to start with. For now, I feel confident in myself, I just need to back up a little bit."

You can view more of Katherine's works on her website at www.fenwickstudio.com.

Katie O'Sullivan [Katie O'Sullivan](#) lives on Cape Cod with her family. In addition to being the Editor of this magazine, she is a freelance writer, copy editor and published author.

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For updates on her kids latest adventures or the antics of her oversized Saint Bernard puppy, visit her [blog](#)