

**Biography: Tracey Maras**  
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***Not your typical.....***

While growing up, most people saw a studious, quiet, very shy young lady. But at the same time, climbing ropes to treehouses, swimming across a creek to pick wild blackberries, horseback riding, bringing home frogs (and an occasional snake) and playing the drums were some of her favorite past times. Shyness and self-doubt or to be brave and adventuresome? It has taken years for her to figure out that while her nature is to be an introvert, her quest in life has been to be fearless, in particular for the things that are outside of her comfort zone. When presented with insecurities, she consciously tells herself "Just do it!" What incredible experiences life holds when you "Just do it!"

In high school, art brought fulfillment and steered her creativity and design capabilities toward a career in Occupational Therapy. Art became a hobby as long work hours proved a barrier to art as a side-profession. In 2000, a rebalance in life brought about a return to art, starting with a dedicated 3 hours per week to paint. In 2010, a transition into a professional role of an artist began with painting on a daily basis, teaching classes and workshops and being represented by galleries in Illinois, Florida and Arizona.

Learning something new every day makes her happy, which is fueled by books, journals, classes, workshops, critique groups, webinars, DVDs/videos, experimentation and most of all, teaching. Teaching results in experimenting far more than she would if working alone in her studio. Students push the teacher in her to inspire the creativity in them. Helping facilitate their development makes her a better artist.

She has found that working in a variety of settings also helps advance her skills, with each working venue offering different experiences. Her studio at home is time for quiet reflection and research. Open Studio sessions at Springfield Art Association and Tranquility Art Studio, both locations where she teaches, provide critiques and learning experiences with other artists. And occasionally en plein air, particularly when traveling, has greatly enhanced her observation skills.

What inspires her? What doesn't inspire her?! Nature is life's greatest inspiration. She is inspired by details, whether it is the touch of sunlight on a tree, the dance of water in a river, the intimacy of a flower, or the glint in the eye of an animal. To keep her work from becoming unfocused, as her interests are varied, she tends to work in series. Each series pushes beyond what was done before through a different linear perspective, color theme or story.

Because she is drawn to details, her technique is a process of thoughtful planning. When taking reference photos, she is thinking in terms of composition, focal point and value structure, asking how to make the scene better. Her current focus is on developing color harmonies. Critical to this is utilizing colorful underpaintings. These

add dimension, depth and life to the painting. Her handling of the pastels is a thoughtful and delicate process, a gentle touch that allows her to create layering of hues into an opalescent shimmer.

Her historical influences include the Hudson River School artists, with their homage to the splendor of America; Maxfield Parrish's ability to create the illusion of glow emanating from the canvas; and Sargent's dance of colors. Contemporary influences include those at the forefront of pastels: Liz Haywood-Sullivan, Richard McKinley and Kay Hurley.

Her interests outside of art revolve around nature and an appreciation for animals. Volunteering at an animal shelter would result in her bringing home every cat and dog. Instead, she volunteers at the Illinois Raptor Center and helps with the care of injured wildlife, participates in educational programs and is involved with releasing rehabbed animals back to the wild. In the wilds of nature she enjoys traipsing through rivers looking for rocks, climbing over fallen logs, immersed in a blanket of dawn fog, or quietly sitting and watching wildlife around her. Her husband purchased a digital camera for her and many thousands of photos (and a few camera upgrades) later, photos have developed from being reference photos for future paintings to standing on their own artistic merit.

The passion of creating art is not so much about the end product as the process. It is a reason to be out in nature, experiencing the world and getting muddy. It is a reason to question why a sunflower growing on the tundra is 2 inches tall, why a mountain created by plate tectonics looks different than one created by a volcano, why an Eastern red-tailed hawk looks different than a Western one. Then there is her growth as an artist. When introduced to an unfamiliar technique, she opens herself up to the experience. What can she learn from it? She loves to share what she has learned and believes that her entire life has been spent as a teacher in some capacity. Her mission as an artist is to appreciate the gift of the world around us and share that awareness with others.

**Professional Memberships:**

- Juried member of Pastel Society of America
- Juried member of the Illinois Artisans Program
- Juried member of Prairie Art Alliance
- Springfield Art Association
- Illinois Prairie Pastel Society

**Gallery Representation:**

- Prairie Art Alliance, Hoogland Center for the Arts, Springfield, IL
- Bug's Splatter, Zephyrhills, FL
- Skidmore Gallery – Galena, IL
- Xanadu Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ
- Illinois Raptor Center, Decatur, IL
- Obed & Isaac's Microbrewery, Springfield, IL

### **Awards/Recognition:**

- Awarded for “Joyful Guardians” in the Bold Brush Painting Competition  
Favorite 15%, November 2015
- Awarded for “Carl the Magnificent” in the Bold Brush Painting Competition  
Favorite 15%, July 2015
- Awarded for “Parade of Future Heroes” in the Bold Brush Painting Competition  
Favorite 15%, January 2015
- Awarded the “George King Award for Pastel Excellence”, Illinois Prairie Pastel  
Society, August 2014
- Awarded for “Classical Reflections” in the Bold Brush Painting Competition  
Favorite 15%, August 2014
- Honorable Memorable award for “Joyful Guardians” in Professional Artist: Category –  
Drawing in the Illinois State Fair, August 2013
- 2<sup>nd</sup> place award for “Tucked in for the Night” in Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and  
Photographers National Conference, May 2013
- Honorable Mention award for “You know when it’s hot when...” in Rocky  
Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers National Conference, May 2013
- 1<sup>st</sup> place award for “Crystal Clear” in Sangamon County Historical Society’s 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Annual Historical Arts Competition, September 2012
- 3<sup>rd</sup> place award for “Bells in Repose” in Sangamon County Historical Society’s 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Annual Historical Arts Competition, September 2012
- Awarded for “The Path We Take” in the Bold Brush Painting Competition Favorite  
15%, May 2012
- Semi-finalist for “Strong & True” in Plein Air Magazine’s Salon Art Competition, 2011
- 1<sup>st</sup> place award for “Principles” in the Sangamon County Historical Society’s  
1<sup>st</sup> Annual Art Competition, September 2011

### **Publications:**

- Front Cover Art for “Collage” Book by Mike Shepherd, August 2015
- Front Cover Feature for “Discovering Beauty” for Illinois Heritage Magazine, Illinois  
State Historical Society, March/April 2015
- Featured in State Journal Register newspaper article on “Award for Pastel  
Excellence”, August 2014
- Featured in State Journal Register newspaper article on the Springfield Art  
Association’s Paint the Streets Festival, July 2014
- Featured in State Journal Register newspaper article on the “Working Hands” Solo  
Artist Show, July 2014
- “Secrets” featured by Illinois Artisans Program for Membership Appreciation  
Celebration, June 2013
- “Jubilee” featured in the Illinois Times newspaper on the Springfield Art Association’s  
100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, April 2013
- Featured in The Southern newspaper on Southern Illinois Art & Artisans Center,  
November 2012
- Featured in State Journal Register newspaper article on the Lincoln Memorial Garden  
Art in the Garden, May 2012

Featured in Springfield's Own magazine on the Illinois Prairie Pastel Society's creations of pastel paintings for recipients of a new home through Habitat for Humanity, April 2012

Featured in State Journal Register newspaper Arts & Entertainment section "Artists to Watch", October 20, 2011

### **Juried and Solo Shows:**

From the Land of Lincoln – Juried Exhibition at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, January – April 2016

October National 2015 Juried Fine Art Show, October 2015

Engrained Brewery Local Crafts Festival – Featured Artist, July 2015

Chatham Area Library's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Call to Entry Juried Show, January 2015

Illinois State Museum – "Handmade in Illinois" Show, December 2014

Prairie House Gallery – "Working Hands" Solo Show, August/September 2014

Prairie Art Alliance - "Nature is the Art of God" Featured Artist Show, March/April 2014

Chatham Area Library's 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Call to Entry Juried Show, January 2014

Lincoln Land Community College James S. Murray Gallery - Solo Show, October 2013

Illinois State Fair – Professional Artists' Competition, August 2013

Illinois State Museum Southern Illinois Art & Artisans Center – Featured Artist Exhibit, August – October 2013

Illinois Artisans Art Spree, Illinois Artisans Program, Chicago IL, June 2013

Springfield Art Association Botanicals Juried Show, April 2013

Springfield Art Association 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Show, April 2013

Springfield Art Association Black & White Juried Show, April 2013

Chatham Area Library 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Call to Art Juried Show, February 2013

Illinois State Museum Southern Illinois Art & Artisans Center Open House, November 2012

Illinois State Museum Southern Illinois Art & Artisans Center – Featured Artist Exhibit, July 2012

Chatham Area Library 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Call to Art Juried Show, February 2012

Prairie Art Alliance - "Themes & Variations" Featured Artist, May-June 2011

Illinois Artisans Art Spree, Illinois Artisans Program, Chicago IL, March 2011

### **Workshop Venues:**

Painting Snow Landscapes – 1 day workshop, Tranquility Art Studio, January 2016

Painting Snow Landscapes – 1 day workshop, Dick Blick (Galesburg), December 2015, January 2016

Color Theory – 2 day workshop, Springfield Art Association, October 2015

Introduction to Painting Portraits – 1 day workshop, Tranquility Art Studio, July 2015

Introduction to Pastels – 1 day workshop, Tranquility Art Studio, April 2015

Color Theory – 1 day workshop, Tranquility Art Studio, March 2015, September 2014

Roaring Pastels – workshops for Scholastic Art Program Award Recipients, February 2015

Introduction to Painting Animals – 1 day workshop, Tranquility Art Studio, February 2015, January 2014, July 2014, August 2013

Photography for Painters – 1 day workshop, Tranquility Art Studio, October 2014  
Introduction to Pastels – 2 day workshop, Southern Illinois Artisan Center, June 2014  
Introduction to Pastels – 2 day workshop, Springfield Art Association, March 2014,  
November 2014  
Introduction to Painting Birds – 1 day workshop, Tranquility Art Studio, February 2014,  
October 2013  
Introduction to Pastels – 2 day workshop, Southern Illinois Artisan Center, October  
2013  
Artistry in Photography – seminar, Lifelong Learning Institute of Lincoln Land  
Community College, April 2013  
Introduction to Pastels – 4 week series, Tranquility Art Studio, July 2013, February  
2013, October 2012, August 2012

### **Quotations from Collectors, Students, Gallery Docents:**

“Couldn’t attend the opening, but just went by to see the wonderful exhibit. So many stories revealed w/ love, thought & artistry. Beautiful!” M. Beaver

“Attended Tracey’s great ‘hands’ show at Prairie House this evening. It’s a consummate lesson in great pastel work, marketing and thematic presentation. There were red ‘sold’ dots all over the place.” G. King

“‘Discovering Beauty’” really touches my soul. It reminds me of the beautiful women in my life with hands that tell a story. My Mom, Nana, etc. who hands were not always manicured because they were busy doing things for their family and friends. They have left this earth but will never be forgotten. They cooked, gardened, cleaned and most of all held their hands in mine. Today is my birthday and your newsletter has made missing them easier for me. I am 70 today and still wish I could hold the hands of these special ladies. You are a special artist that brings beauty and emotion to your works. I am lucky to have met you. Your paintings are so thoughtful.” D. Crawley

“Wow! I love the compositions and the color! The paintings invoke feelings from my childhood of fun and excitement and happiness. I love the action in the paintings and the stories that they tell. Your art is taking giant steps forward! Hope to paint with you soon. You inspire me.” P. Kreppert

“Your research, enthusiasm and teaching ability all get an A++ from me!!” C. Elzea

“I loved the class. It hit exactly where I am weakest. I thought the presentation was excellent and having us implement what we learned was just what I needed. I cannot thank you enough for putting all that effort towards helping us.” C. O’Sullivan

“You are such a natural teacher. Great workshop!” M. Beaver

“Congratulations Tracey. You are amazingly talented.” L. Stalter – Professor of Art, Lincoln Land Community College