



JAN HEATON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RHONDA BROOKE DOW



JAN HEATON's art quietly creates an emotional connection, inviting us into a special feeling, place, and time informed by the structure, color, and intricate patterns in nature. Working in watercolor, Jan's organic forms integrate with the texture of the heavy cotton paper. Her marks, pigment selections, and translucent layers are precise, thoughtful, and carefully executed.

A WORKING ARTIST

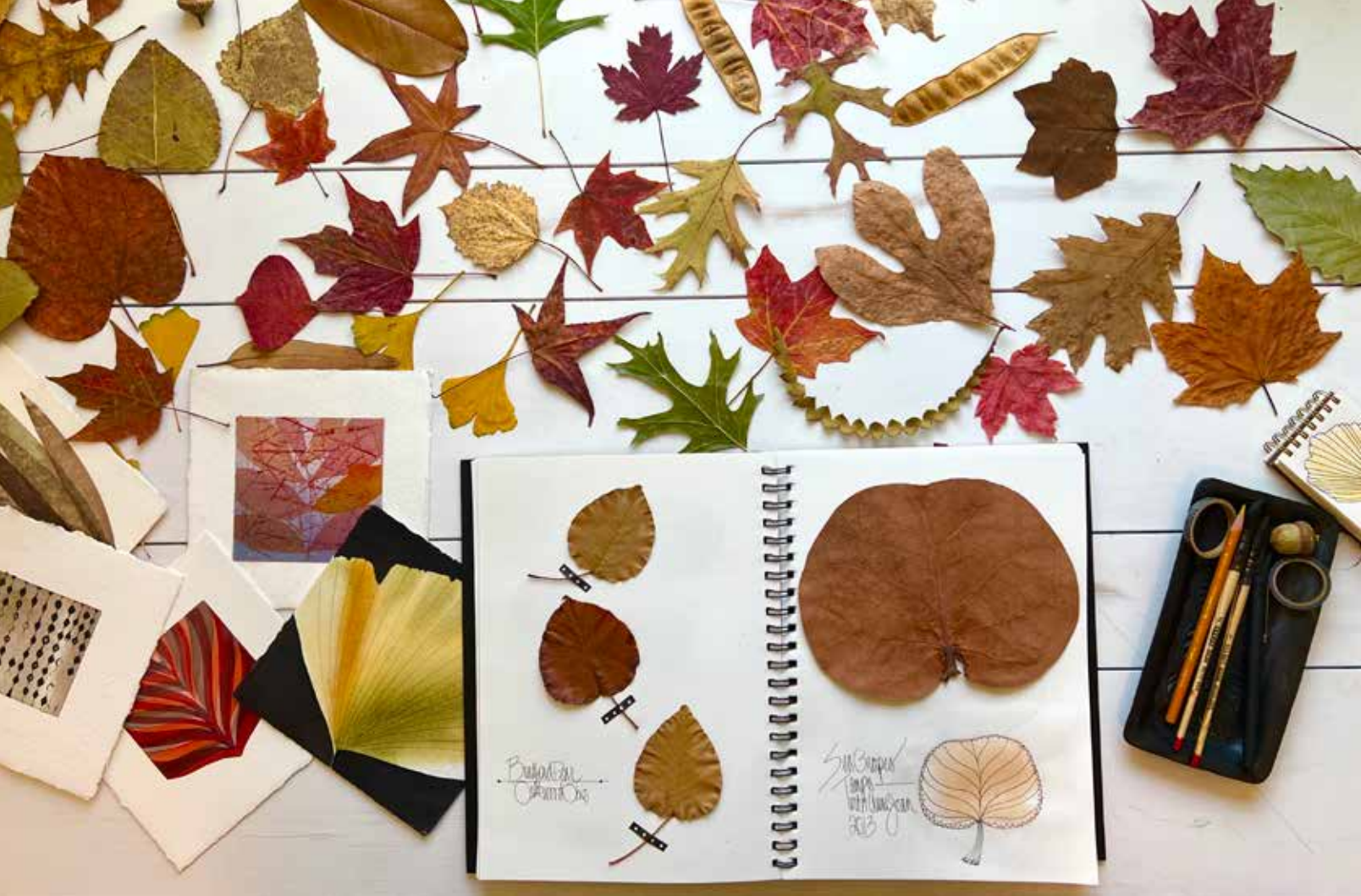
In 2003, I was a single mom working long hours as the production director at an Austin, Texas, advertising agency. Many of my co-workers were unaware that I was also making art and painting. They knew me as the one who produced projects, built schedules, crunched numbers, and managed the production department. Yet a playful reminder of my creative side lived in my office—a hula hoop I had made. I had worked 15 years in design and marketing, where I wore many hats as an illustrator, calligrapher, graphic designer, proofreader, art director, and production manager. In my limited free time, I would paint and draw at night and on weekends.

On Mother's Day in May 2003, my lovely daughters, Kristin and Allison, surprised me

with an unexpected gift—a website. They had registered www.janheaton.com as my domain, photographed my artwork, and designed a homepage to showcase it. They firmly advised me: "Mom, it's time to focus on making art." Simple words, yet the best advice I've ever received. As fate would have it, that year I was laid off, along with 30 other employees. I then chose to focus on my artwork. In the first year, I was excited to present my first solo exhibition at an Austin gallery. I continued to work part time in marketing for five years, then left in 2008 to work full time as an artist. My fellow employee friends gifted me with a handmade book with "I promise to paint every day" on the front cover, along with their sweet notes of inspiration.

TEACHING

In 2006, I taught my first watercolor workshop at the Austin Museum of Art, Art School. I approached teaching watercolor with total honesty, no secrets, and I shared everything I knew with my students. The students utilized these tools to create their own unique work. More requests to teach have since come my way, and my classes are always full, often with a wait list. I currently teach workshops at Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Contemporary Austin Art School, Oklahoma Arts Institute, Peninsula School of Art, and Rosewood Arts Center. I will also be teaching a 2026 workshop in Oaxaca, a culinary and art tour with my long-time friend, Iliana de la Vega, 2002 James Beard Foundation Texas Chef of the Year. After that first workshop in Austin, I became involved with Dell Children's Hospital's annual fundraiser, *The Art of Giving*, an event that supports art and music therapy programs at the hospital. Since moving to Ohio in the summer of 2024, I have also painted with my granddaughters and their classmates at their school's lunchtime watercolor club.



MY PROCESS

My work is inspired by nature and guided by memories with a strong desire to create a calm place in time and bring a moment of peace. I lost my lovely daughter Kristin to cancer in February 2019. My work has been greatly influenced by her, and this loss has motivated me to strive for serenity. I think that is represented in my work. I believe in the power of art to heal.

A long morning walk often starts my day. Always alone and unplugged, it's a time to look, plan the day, and listen to a symphony of morning sounds. Ideas come easily when you are immersed in nature. Small moments of beauty move through me. Editing is the hard part. The observations, and sometimes a photo, go home with me from my walks. I will then isolate structure, color, line, shape, rhythm, and place. It's a good beginning. Initially, I paint small watercolor studies on Fabriano 300-pound

cold-press paper or in a small sketchbook. I have paintings of all sizes in progress at the same time. Working with multiple brands of watercolor tube pigment, I rarely use a color straight from the tube because I prefer the freedom of mixing my own colors. I layer them to create transparent overlays, a unique aspect of this medium that I love. I often listen to music while I paint.

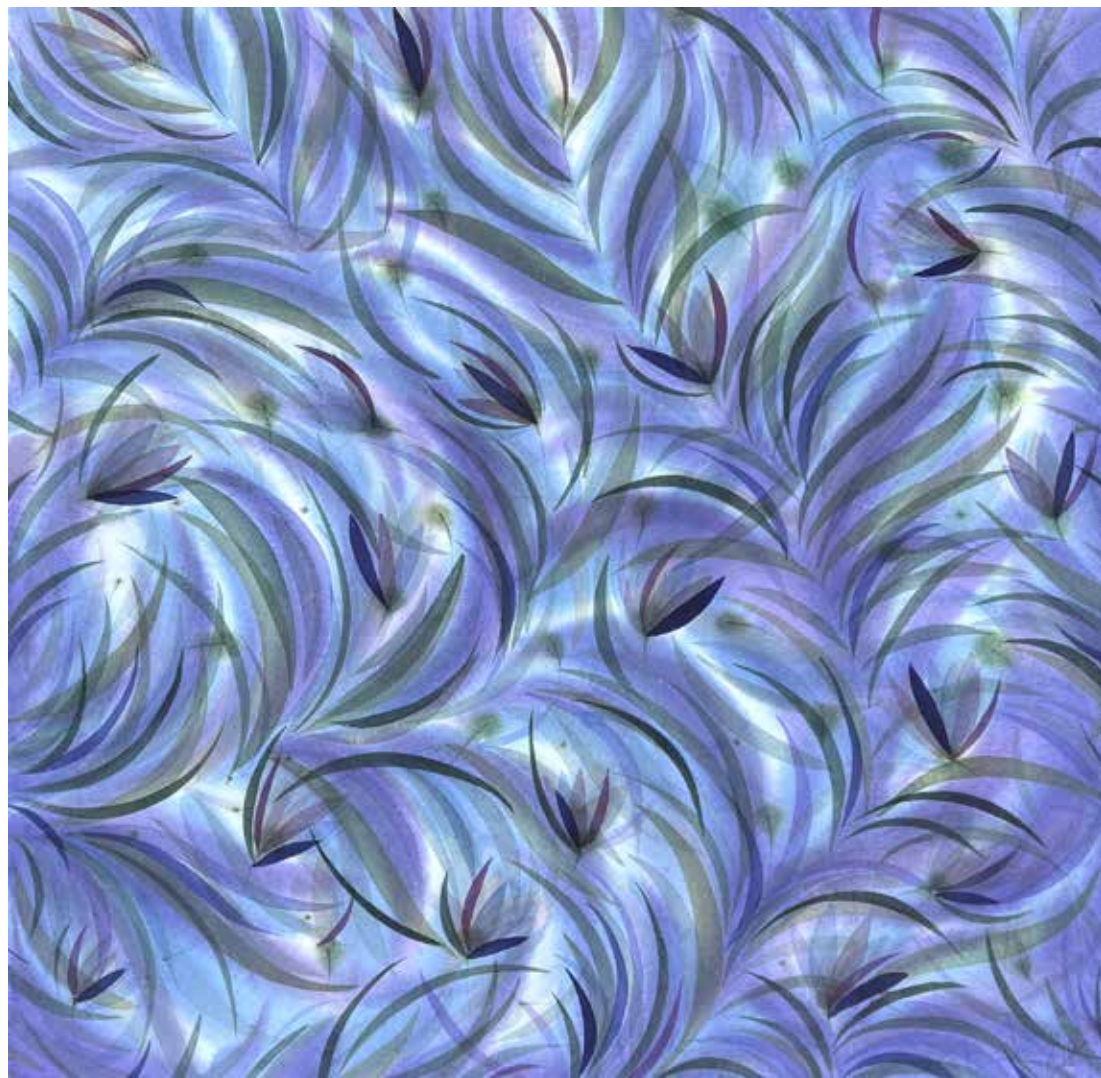
I recycle everyday things to discover new tools to paint with that are affordable. A sharpened chopstick dipped in pigment makes a beautiful line on sponged wet paper. My old, worn-out dish towels replace the paper towels I once used. A tiny metal kitchen whisk mixes paint. A medicine dropper lets me add pigment to large mixes. I love my retro ceramic TV trays that have large, deep partitions to mix color for palettes. I'm always curious about how to re-source inexpensive tools not purchased at an art supply store.

Painting what I see gives me joy. My daughter, Allison, grows allium, an ornamental onion, in her garden. This tall, graceful, and stately plant with a gorgeous blue/purple ball of tiny flowers in a spherical bloom of calm just begs to be painted. Initially, I explored ideas on how to interpret this image onto small pieces of trimmed, heavy watercolor paper. I focus on the elements that are important to me.

The recipe is in my head, and I sample the details that will determine my direction. I am always interested in establishing a focal point, movement, a journey, and a destination. With a focus on color, I like to balance big washes of spontaneous color with the contrast of planned marks. The small color tests and images will grow in size as I determine my direction and explore the options. Art therapy in a brush! Painting repetitive marks calms me.

*Every day I see or hear something
that more or less kills me with
delight,
that leaves me like a needle in the
haystack of light.
It was what I was born for—to
look, to listen,
to lose myself inside this soft
world.*

—MARY OLIVER



MY STUDIO

In my Oakwood, Ohio, home, I converted a 13-by-11-foot bedroom into a studio. It provides the focus and quiet I need to paint without interruption. A traditional studio space never suited me, nor did I want to leave home. For me, less is more. I value solitude, though I sometimes describe myself as an extroverted introvert. The light is perfect and the room has good energy. On my table, a photo of my artist Mom smiles at me every morning. The room is small but efficient, and reminds me of working on a puzzle, looking for the right place for everything. The table I paint on measures 40-by-108-inches—large enough to serve

dinner for ten. I love its versatility. It easily accommodates a 60-by-40-inch sheet of Arches cold-press paper, giving me plenty of space to work freely.

My 100-year-old wood flat file with fourteen drawers can hold 30-by-40-inch artwork. The closet (a study in stacking) is organized with supplies, artwork, and much more. A pale green, old metal cabinet with tiny drawers holds pencils, pens, rubber bands, erasers, and other supplies. My granddaughters love to rummage through the drawers! Where we create our work is vital and key to producing our best art.

NEXT

New projects are always in progress. I am currently working on a series for a solo exhibit at Davis Gallery in Austin that opens April 4, 2026. I intend to create more work in Laguna Beach. The ocean, beaches, and flora are always a source of inspiration and a bonus to be close to my grandson, Heaton, and my California family. I am a firm believer in continuing education, and plan to take a ceramics workshop with my daughter this year. I would also love to learn Spanish. I believe we are all creative and I would like to write a book that proves we are all artists, just using different media. With what I have learned and experienced, I know that art is my language and my refuge.

My business has grown, as well as my gallery representation. My artwork is represented by Davis Gallery (Austin), Hunt Gallery (San Antonio), Studio

El (San Francisco), Sharon Weiss Gallery (Columbus), and Hoadley Gallery (Seattle & Boston). I'm always busy making art and teaching, which is perfect for me. A friend once asked me what my plans were for retirement. Surprised, I responded that artists don't retire; they simply keep making art. I am so very grateful.

MORE ON

Jan

www.janheaton.com

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