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Featured Artist of The Month: Paula Leftwich

"The world is just so full of things to paint!" Even as a very small child, Paula saw the world in terms of "pictures," and always wanted to draw and paint them.

Animals, especially birds, were an early attraction for her. Her mother still has many "works" she created early on; one of the earliest is a crayon drawing of a pelican sitting on a dock post. An odd choice for a young "Army brat" living in Ger-

practice. She moved to The Gulf Coast of Mississippi in the early 1990s, where she again worked as a veterinary technician, and started a dog training business. Painting was always a constant, however, and she focused on painting the native birds of the region.

Hurricane Katrina devastated the area and her small town in 2005. Not only did she lose her home and virtually every possession, but



many, where certainly no pelicans reside! (Who knew she would spend much of her adult life near southern coastlines where pelicans abound?)

Paula is entirely self taught, and worked with several mediums before discovering acrylic paints. She loves the vibrancy and versatility of acrylics, and their rapid drying time lends itself well to her style of repeated layers and fine detail.

Like many artists, Paula worked a variety of jobs throughout the years, in New Orleans I worked for a company that imported European estate items and jewelry, then later as a veterinary technician in an exotic animal

also lost all the art in her home studio, as well as everything she had hanging in local galleries. Paula remember one of the very first "care packages" she received afterwards had a drawing pad and an inexpensive set of acrylic paints ... she was SO happy to have

that! Being able to paint again sustained Paula through the very difficult recovery and rebuilding process.

Moving to The Florida Keys nearly 4 years ago was a dream come true for Paula. "I knew I was going to love it here, but I didn't realize how it was going to change my art... The very first time I went snorkeling and saw the fish, the reef, all that LIFE under there I knew I wanted to paint it."

Suddenly it was like an entire new world opened up for her. Underwater photography quickly became a new hobby and a way to capture "moments" that she revisits on canvas; the huge Goliath Grouper that nearly swal-

lowed her camera, the boldly colorful parrotfish, the Queen Angelfish playing peek-a-boo under the staghorn coral.

Birds still show up in Paula's work, however. The Keys offer a variety of birds to paint, the majestic osprey, comical ibis, and of course, her old friend, the pelican!

Paula Leftwich is a member & advisor in the Florida Keys Council of the Arts Member, Art Guild of the Purple Isle. She shows at Art on a Whim Gallery in Islamorada, and soon will be in Shady Palm Gallery (Marathon). Visit her website, PaulaPaints.com, or at PaulaPaints on Facebook.

