

Title: Zoe Linn Jarvis
Large-Scale Colored Pencil Drawings on Paper
Subtitle: Celebrations of Nature

“Growing up, flowers bloomed wild and untamed in the pastures at my family’s farm and in my mother’s garden. Eighteen years later, at my father’s funeral, flowers became a symbol of love and memorial. Flowers represent nature’s beauty, memory, and love. Flowers represent joy.”

For me, nature is a source of solace and a reminder of one’s individual strength and resilience. My drawings present nature in the form of abundant flower blooms, rendered exclusively in Prismacolor Premier Soft Core colored pencils spread across large sheets of Lenox 100 paper.

I discovered my love of colored pencils in high school. In my senior year at W.T. Woodson High School in Fairfax, Virginia, I took AP Studio Art with Mrs. Jayne Matricardi-Burke, a gifted artist and teacher. There was a box of colored pencils in the classroom. For my AP Studio Art Concentration, I worked from observation to create twelve large drawings of my hands arranged in different positions to evoke a range of emotions. Experimenting with the pencils, I applied color to each drawing using a crosshatching technique, building up layers of rich, waxy hues to stir an emotional response within the viewer.

Observational drawing informs and fuels much of my artwork. I learned of the artistic advantages that come with the ability to work from observation in a landscape painting class with professor Mark Karnes in my junior year at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). Looking to the natural world for inspiration, Karnes encouraged us to paint directly from life. He structured his class schedule so that each period the class traveled to a different park, campus, or lake that would serve as our subject for the day. Rather than sitting in one spot to paint, I grew interested in the challenge of moving my painting station around throughout the day and working from a selection of vantage points. I practiced quickly recording on my canvas the colors and shapes I saw in an effort to capture the scene while the light constantly changed overhead. This swift painting process forced me to make compositional and technical decisions and execute them without hesitation. This process has helped me get unstuck from the idea that each mark was precious, commonly referred to as “masterpiece syndrome.” I began building compositions and describing form through blocky shapes, color, and tone rather than through lines, details, and textures. After taking Karnes’ class my approach to working from observation changed. My work improved. This was a new way of seeing for me.

Senior year at MICA is structured around the development of a year long, self-directed, independent thesis project. Students have the opportunity to showcase their artistic achievements at the year’s end in the 2015 MICA Senior Thesis Exhibition. I knew that I wanted to exploit my newly acquired knowledge about working from observation. I also wanted to use my artwork to finally address the death of my father, Jeff Jarvis, who died during the first semester of my freshman year at MICA and the trauma was still raw.

For several weeks I struggled to come up with a solid idea for my thesis project. I reached a desperate point where I decided I needed to pick a project and follow through without doubts or looking back. Following instinct, I walked to the MICA art store, bought an 80” sheet of paper off of the 72” roll of Lenox 100 paper, and tacked it up on my studio walls. In pencil, I drew a large hibiscus flower in the center of the paper, then another, and another. For color, I turned to

the familiarity and comfort of colored pencils that I had discovered in Jayne's high school art classroom. I colored in my studio every day, watching the studio fill to peak capacity with students during the day and empty to a state of abandonment at night. I would almost always be the last person in the building. Throughout the year, I was awarded a MICA Senior Thesis Grant, which provided supplementary funding to help hard working seniors cover project material expenses. To this day, my mother jokes that "I eat the pencils" at the quick rate that I burn through them and need to go buy more. After about six months of clocking in at the studio day and night, I had completed two greatly detailed 72"x78" floral drawings rendered solely in colored pencil, "Hibiscus Syriacus" and "Red Chrysanthemums." The 2015 MICA Senior Thesis Exhibition was my first big success. I sold both of my large-scale colored pencil drawings to a private art collector in Nassau, Bahamas. Launching into my thesis project marked the beginning of making my signature large-scale colored pencil drawings.

Each of my drawings depicts only one kind of flower. The flower is repeated in varying sizes and from differing vantage points until the myriad flowers begin to exist together. The drawings are built-up and discovered over time, somewhat unpredictably. They are composed of small crosshatched areas that begin in a localized region on the paper and are replicated, expanding in all directions from the point of origin. Size and direction of the crosshatches influences which way the composition will grow. In a sense, each drawing is an endurance project of marks advancing across the paper. The more time I spend on the drawing the more realized and exposed the composition becomes. These drawings seem to motivate the creation of themselves. My drawings embody how family and nature have impacted my life.

I work both from observation and from studying botanical drawings and photographs in order to learn the way a certain type of flower appears. I then practice drawing the distinct curves of the flower's form as I remember them. Real-life flowers inspire these drawings but the end result is a colorful, reimagined composite of the flower.

The amount of time required to complete a large-scale colored pencil drawing varies depending on several factors: the overall size of the drawing and type of flower. A 6 ft. x 6 ft. drawing may take roughly 300-400 hours or 4-5 months to complete. I log my studio hours in a notebook at the start and end of each studio session. This how I budget my time, track my work hours, and manage deadlines for commissions and exhibitions.

In some cases, an artist's process holds greater significance than the final image that results. In my work, I believe the finished piece outshines the process. Despite this, one element of my process endures even after a piece is complete: my pencil shavings jar. This jar symbolizes my artistic process. Electric pencil sharpeners do not properly sharpen my pencils to the precise tip that I require. Prismacolor Premier Soft Core Colored pencils have a wax binder and electric pencil sharpeners warm this wax binder in such a way that a sharp tip cannot be achieved. So each time a pencil dulls, I manually sharpen it using a little red plastic sharpener. Over time, the pencil shavings accumulate in fairly enormous quantities. The more I draw, the fuller the jar becomes. For exhibitions, I choose to display the jar of amassed pencil shavings alongside the drawings as a reminder of my process. The pencil shavings plainly convey the labor and time required to make one of my large drawings.

As an artist who depicts primarily flowers in my work, one might ask what I consider to be my favorite type of flower. I am fond of the hibiscus. Also known as the Rose of Sharon, the hibiscus has vibrant, translucent petals that appear gentle while burning with spirit. Looking at them brings joy. The hibiscus is the national flower of Korea. As a Korean adoptee that has yet to visit Korea as an adult, hibiscus flowers resound within me as a part of my identity that I often

wonder about and am hopeful to explore one day in the future.