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*In a class by herself*

Photo by Pat Sunderland

A corner of Sheryl's home is devoted to producing instructional videos for artists around the world. Alcohol ink, brushes, refillable pens and markers are within easy reach as Sheryl records her lessons.

BY PAT SUNDERLAND

Managing Editor

Sheryl Williams has taught hundreds of students the art of painting with alcohol ink, but only one has actually stepped foot in her Delta studio. The remainder are online students who follow Sheryl's instructional videos via the internet.

"Alcohol ink is an amazing medium," she says. She explains the alcohol evaporates, leaving concentrated dye in vivid hues of color.

As an artist, she has sketched with pencils and used watercolors to create incredibly detailed paintings. Those realistic touches can be a challenge with watercolors, but Sheryl overcomes that challenge by using only a tiny amount of water. Still, it can take her three months to complete a painting. Then she discovered alcohol ink could cut the process to three days.

She came across the relatively new fine art medium online and began taking classes from Karen Walker. Karen was one of the first artists to

elevate alcohol ink from the world of crafts to works of fine art.

Like many artists new to alcohol ink, Sheryl began by creating abstracts, but they really weren't her style. Through experimentation, she began to use a "loose pour" for the background, masking the subject area and then using markers and fine pens to add details.

Two years ago, Karen decided to give up the online classes and she gave Sheryl an opportunity to take over.

In a sparsely populated community like Delta, where not many folks have the money for art lessons, Sheryl realized it would be difficult to teach art lessons on any scale unless she went online. She took up the torch from Karen.

Fortunately, she'd found her niche in a relatively new medium. "If I was working in watercolor, there would be all kinds of competition," she says.

Through Google, Pinterest and Facebook in particular, eager students have found

Sheryl's classes. She currently has 237 students from the Netherlands to Ireland to Australia. About a quarter of her students live in Canada.

"That's so cool for somebody living here in the middle of nowhere," she says.

Williams is the instructional coordinator at Delta-Montrose Technical College, working with teachers to make instruction more effective whether they're in the classroom or delivering classes online. She's been able to use those skills in her own online classes.

The class is not live, but features a series of self-paced instructional videos that can be viewed at the participant's convenience. Given the time difference from Europe to Australia to the United States, that's really the only way the class can work. The "screen freezes" common to online delivery can also be avoided with videos.

Level I is for beginners, Level II covers tools and techniques, and in Level III, participants begin painting animals — cats, dogs and even chickens. Sheryl encourages her students to closely study the texture of fur, the direction of feathers. "They learn how to paint what they see, not what they know. They get really crazy observant," Sheryl says.

Level IV is water, which can be difficult to replicate. Students learn that reflections involve far more than turning an image upside down. They study the difference between mirrors and windows — mirrors being the reflection of the sky in the water, and windows being the ability to see through water to the sand, pebbles and aquatic life beneath. "It's such a privilege to be able to observe the world in that much detail, and then there's the joy of doing it with paint," Sheryl says.

Many of her students are new artists, so Sheryl's lessons incorporate fundamentals such as color, light, composition and shading to add dimension.

"A lot of my students have never taken lessons, because they don't think they're artists. Then they start playing with alcohol inks and say, 'Oh, I can do this!' They love the vibrant colors."

Free sample lessons are available on Sheryl's website, sherylwilliamsart.com. That gives folks an opportunity to decide if they want to sign up for the classes.

Sheryl shoots and edits the videos herself. The process begins with a photo she plans to replicate. With that image clearly visible to students, she explains every step of the process as she paints. The video might end up being 12 hours long, so it has to be edited. Sheryl takes the disk out of her video camera, puts it in her computer and starts editing until she's got five lessons, each about seven minutes in length. Text is also available to those who want to print out the lessons and organize them in notebooks.

"I talk and I paint. When I say we need a little more white over here, they can

compare the image to what I'm doing. It's crazy how good they're getting."

Having mastered the techniques, Sheryl says 50 to 60 of her students are now selling their work. Several Facebook groups have emerged, where students post photos of their completed works of art and exchange feedback with fellow artists across the world.

"It's so neat to have that community of sharing," Sheryl says. "They really help each other a lot."

"For me as a teacher, it brings tears to my eyes to see how somebody starts out, doing dipping and pouring." Gradually they master the techniques, learning to control the alcohol and producing amazing works of art.

"I am so proud and amazed by the fabulous work of these artists," she says.

Her own work was recently displayed in the Edge of Cedars and Delta Fine Arts exhibits.

Kayla Mock, the "live" student who receives one-on-one instruction in Sheryl's studio, also showed her work in the student division of the Delta Fine Arts show.

Kayla, 11, participated in one of Sheryl's art parties and, like Sheryl, got hooked on alcohol ink. She's been developing her techniques for a couple of years. Recently, she finished a painting of a zebra and started on another project in just one hour-and-a-half lesson.

"Sheryl has been great at guiding what Kayla wants to do as an artist — letting her have some freedom in expression, while building her skills as an artist in a thoughtful, organized way," says Lisa, Kayla's mother.

That same style of gentle guidance comes through in the instructional videos, as well as Sheryl's blog, which is brimming with tips and techniques that will help turn anyone into an artist.



Because she hates to let her original paintings go, Sheryl has prints made of many of her originals. That gives her the flexibility to enlarge the artwork to fit a recycled frame, or to reduce it for the front of a notecard.



Photo by Pat Sunderland

Sheryl describes the "breakthrough" moment when she realized she could use alcohol inks to create the kind of detail she values as an artist.



Photo by Pat Sunderland

Kayla Mock experiments with pouring techniques during a lesson in Sheryl Williams' studio.



This purple iris based on a photo by Terry Kryszak at Paint-MyPhoto. "People ask how I select my paintings and I say it is all about the light. I search for hours for an image that stops me in my tracks and this one did it," Sheryl says.