



Susan Thiele in her art studio in Historic Katy

Stroke of Talent

Susan Thiele, a self-taught watercolorist and former Katy ISD teacher, is spreading her love of art one canvas at a time

Written by Cherri Northcutt | Photography by Layla Zakaria

Katy watercolorist Susan Thiele never imagined that she would be a successful artist. When she began drawing flowers in a notebook as a child, she could not have predicted that art would encourage her to travel all over the world, meet numerous types of people, and be commissioned to create pieces of art that would be displayed proudly in homes across the globe.

During a visit to Ireland, Thiele met an Australian man who commissioned one of her most meaningful works. “We were on a train together and he told me about his wife who had passed away,” Thiele remembers. “He had a photo of the last sunset they saw together and asked me to make a painting from that.” Seeing this as a calling from God, Thiele gladly accepted the challenge. “I feel like in some way, it gave him a piece of his wife back.”

Growing up in Art

Thiele began painting and drawing as a child. She was one of four children and the only girl. Her father’s job as a chemical engineer kept the family moving and they lived in different areas around the U.S. including Chicago, Cleveland, and St. Louis before heading south.

Although her childhood may have seemed a bit nomadic, art was always a constant. “Wherever we lived, mom always

had beautiful art on the walls and dad kept the lawn and garden nice, with gorgeous flowers and lush grasses,” Thiele recalls. Her mother always encouraged her artistic side. “I would make little books of my flower drawings and write the scientific name for them when I got bored,” she adds.

Thiele’s parents also took the family to visit art galleries. “In Santa Fe the galleries always had a stuffy man in a suit standing guard,” Thiele says. “I just wanted to look at the paintings, but I remember feeling so intimidated.” Thiele believes that art should be accessible and unpretentious. “Art should not be intimidating or snobby,” she shares.

Teaching Art

After earning her degree in educational psychology, Thiele took classes in literature at the University of Houston. She worked for Conoco before she and her husband moved to Katy to raise their two daughters. “We chose a house in Historic Katy for its character,” Thiele shares. “I love this area and the people.”

“I stayed home with my girls when they were little and started substitute teaching at Katy Elementary School once they started school there,” Thiele shares.

At that time, she began having a recurring dream that she was teaching art classes. “I jokingly told the art teacher there, Judy Vitolo, about my dream,” Thiele says. “Not long after that, Judy took a leave of absence to take care of her husband during an illness and I stepped in.” Thiele taught the art classes at Katy Elementary over the next six months. “I got to do two things I love: teaching and creating art,” she says.

Passion for Painting

That teaching position led Thiele back to painting. “I told my friends, ‘I’m going to start painting,’ and they asked me which room. I had to explain I meant paintings for the wall,” she laughs.

Vivid colors that pop are the first thing you notice in her brilliant natural scenes of birds, flowers, landscapes, and buildings. “Traditional water color is not me, nothing sticks out,” says Thiele. “Nature is my favorite thing to paint.”

Thiele utilizes a variety of tools including sponges, paper towels, and washes, and prefers the plein air method of painting which is to paint outdoors, recreating the visual conditions of the scene at the time of the painting. She has set up her table to paint at several spots around town including the MKT Depot, Heritage Park, and along roadsides to paint wisteria or pear trees. “People that drive by may think I’m the weird lady in town, with my paints and my table,” jokes Thiele.

Overcoming Challenge

Following her passion, Thiele became a featured artist for six years at Katy Art and Frame and began selling paintings. “The hardest part is putting myself out there to be judged,” Thiele says. “I’m completely self-taught and it’s always a

challenge to overcome feeling like I’m not good enough.” Thiele remembers at her first garden showing where she set up a card table and had her parents by her side. “I looked at the other artists there and felt out of my league,” she says. Even so, one of her paintings sold immediately and Thiele persevered.

Her desire to share her art with others inspired Thiele to create notecards of her favorite paintings. “It’s just a small card that you can hang up or send to a friend,” she explains. Her cards are blank inside and available at several locations in Katy including the Cottage Door, Southern Gossip, and Rose Royce Antiques.

World Traveler

Thiele loves to travel and be inspired by different places. “I like to get to know different people and environments. I’ve visited almost every state and country in the world,” Thiele says.

Thiele’s art is displayed in several Texas locations. She is on the board of the Brenham Art League and her notecards have been sent to tsunami survivors in Japan. She has even done a special helmet painting for Katy High School football coach, Gary Joseph.

“Art should be uplifting, and help people get in touch with the brightest, deepest side of their soul,” Thiele says. She believes that there is no typical day for an artist. “You can’t plan inspiration, but when it consumes you, you have to get it out,” she says. “It’s what you do when you’re by yourself - that’s who you are.” **KM**

CHERRI NORTHCUTT is a journalist and an art lover. She has been living in Katy for 15 years with her husband and daughters.



Texas Bluebonnets



Katy Train

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