

# Amanita Gallery

This new Manzanita gallery features detailed, fantastic artwork by local artist and owner Debbie Harmon

Wander into the Amanita Gallery, and it might be some time before you come out. One lingering glance at Manzanita artist Debbie Harmon's finely detailed work invites another — and then another. A pair of delicate trompe l'oeil koi fish swim in a wooden bowl. A garden landscape teems with wee living things. A score of surprising birds and winged insects decorate a simple wood box. Soon time passes unnoticed. Somebody go get Dad.

Harmon's gallery at the upper end of Laneda Avenue is a new undertaking for her. She enjoys the encouragement and experience of her son, Sam, and his wife, Kathryn, artists, too, who have run a number of galleries over the years, including d'Arte in Manzanita and Hands of the Tide in Nehalem, pop-up galleries that took advantage of temporary advantageous leases in buildings between tenants.

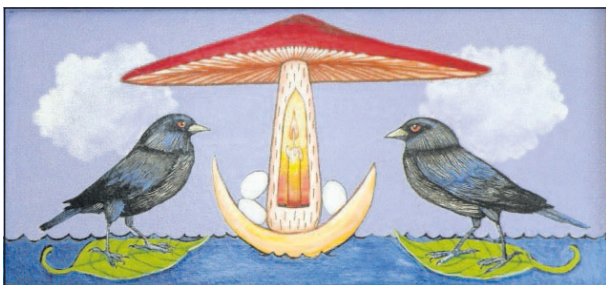
But Amanita is no pop-up. Two years ago, Harmon moved from Nehalem to Manzanita, where she found a house on Division Street, across from the Hoffman Center for the Arts, with showroom space on Laneda Avenue — perfect for her gallery. Harmon is well positioned for a long stay. She lives and paints in the back. Pays no business rent. Hires no help. She gets her art for mostly free, and people are charmed by it.

"The arts are a part of people's everyday life here," offers Sam.

"We have really good patrons here. Local people like to buy local art," says Harmon.

Harmon, who also shows her son's work, has filled her gallery with detailed, fantastic images, many using a scratchboard technique that, with its fine scrimshawy lines, allows her to draw back into the paint and reveal colors behind. The result is nearly hypnotic.

Sam paints big brush, Harmon fine detail. The combination of their two styles in an intimate gallery



Two black birds stand next to an amanita mushroom, the namesake of the gallery, in this painting by Amanita Gallery owner Debbie Harmon.

is pleasing as tree limbs against a moonlit sky. Each artist delights in the other's success and style.

Sam has been painting crows in landscapes for 15 years. "I've done figurative work and portraiture, but I always come back to these guys to say what I want to say," he says.

Sam describes his mother's art, so different from his own. "Here you have these crazy little gnomes, the mystical dragon, Eastern-inspired Buddhas and flowers and birds, or these cottages, yet it's all so cohesive, pulling every facet of nature together in each composition."

"I can't escape doing detail, no matter how hard I try," says Harmon. Clearly each piece represents a long patient spell with an idea.

"I love the wetlands, the detail, the life that is in everything." Her art is populated by a spectrum of creatures

from across the animal and plant kingdoms. Her patterns are sometimes reminiscent of Moroccan tile.

The success of Amanita Gallery's recent celebratory opening May 1, 2 and 3 leaves Harmon, the artist, with a business person's pressing responsibilities. Some of these have been new to her. She's learned to produce her prints in standard sizes suitable for matting, her cards suitable for envelopes. She's trying to guess what will next most please her customers. She needs to choose and hang work to replace the art she's sold. The business and artistic imperatives aren't immediately compatible.

Harmon, who has taught art literacy at Portland's Oak Hills School and at Fire Mountain School, is delighted by the questions her customers' children pose. Her work provides plenty of painstaking detail, even at floor level, to capture their gazes. A wooden statuette of a robed, bearded priest, green-eyed, rosy-cheeked. Why is there a box on his head? Or a classic carved koa serving tray, each green lacquered hollow decorated with a flying insect or winged cat. Why does that cat have a snake in its mouth?

Harmon's work teems with contented life, paused in momentary contemplation. Even that snake in the winged cat's jaws seems okay with it.

"My art isn't just fantasy. It's more my inner view of things," she says. "My inner view outside." Though you might detect a Hindu flavor in some of her painting, she says that's not deliberate. "I'm not really religious," she says. Yet in one



Debbie Harmon works on an art piece in her new Manzanita gallery, Amanita Gallery.

typically colorful painting — a winged and haloed woman surrounded by adoring creation and seated above a banner that reads "Let Heaven and Nature Sing" — Harmon's gentle mixture of Eastern imagery and a Christmas carol invites calm spiritual reflection.

In addition to her distinctive paintings, Harmon salvages items found cheap at flea markets and lavishes them with color and painstakingly drawn figures. Serving trays, cigar boxes, floor tiles find new creative purpose at her hands.

"The gallery offers whole variety of price points, accessible creativity," says Sam. "Useful art," suggests Harmon. Custom word stones, for example, so a gardener can leave a poem in the walkway. Painstakingly decorated small wooden bowls so a table can resurrect something abandoned to an antique shop. A stool, colorfully decorated and in fine detail, that Cheshire-y Cat painted on its seat, that snake in its jaws.



This winged and haloed woman surrounded by adoring creation and seated above a banner that reads "Let Heaven and Nature Sing" showcases the calm spiritual reflection Harmon's work can inspire with its gentle mixture of Eastern imagery and a Christmas carol.

The Amanita Gallery is open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Thursday through Sunday and by appointment.

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