

The Best of

in her studios

5 One-of-a-Kind Art Studios and the Stories Behind Them

A Scottish Castle Becomes an Art Studio

My Floating Studio

The Art of Turning Burdens into Blessings

And More



The Art of Turning Burdens Into *Blessings*

“Let blessings fall like blossoms all around you.”

— Rumi

BY CARRIE SCHMITT

“How can I turn this burden into a blessing?” This question has guided my art path as I’ve navigated illness, divorce, single parenthood, and financial limitations. My journey began in 2009 when I developed a severe allergy to heat, including my own body heat. While bedridden, I began making art as a therapeutic practice. ▸



Despite my depressing health issue, my relationship with art had a beautiful beginning. *Because it saved my life, I only have deep adoration and gratitude for the creative process, which to this day influences how I approach my work.* Instead of doubt, fear, or criticism, there is only love when I create. The other blessing from this difficult time was finding my sacred purpose as a full-time artist, author, and art retreat facilitator to share the healing properties of art with others. ▸



In 2018, I grew frustrated after being unable to find an affordable studio in the Seattle area despite years of searching. In desperation, my solution was to convert a 2002 Bluebird Handibus into Rosie, my beloved mobile art studio and traveling storefront to sell my products at festivals. I found my bus on Craigslist and paid \$4,500 for her, which was less than a month's rent at a retail space in my town. I hired a food truck builder to help me with renovations, which was an investment but still less than a year's rent. The biggest expenses with the renovation were buying a generator and a heating/cooling unit designed for RVs. After these initial upfront renovation costs, I only have to pay for insurance, general maintenance, and gas, which is under \$500 per month.





Rosie's interior is a fully functioning workspace with hardwood floors, a couch/bed, a folding table, a functional sink to wash paintbrushes, antique dressers for storage, and plenty of space to paint. I painted the outside of Rosie a soft pink color with my signature flowers, and the bus functions as a traveling billboard that advertises my art and website. Having a mobile art studio presents some challenges, including parking and mechanical issues, which I expected when I bought an older bus. Despite these minor inconveniences, the blessings Rosie has brought me are greater than I could have imagined.

Part of the allure of a mobile art studio was to make art more visible in my community and to participate in creative place-making, the idea that creativity is contagious. Studies show that individuals and businesses become more creative when exposed to arts in their physical space. With this in mind, I installed a rooftop deck on top of the bus for artists and musicians to share the live creative process with others. Except for a few grumpy neighbors, I've been shocked by the community's outpouring of love for Rosie. Everywhere I go people cheer, wave, and take pictures. I often receive emails from strangers I have passed on the street telling me how happy seeing the bus made them. ▸



My Studio Playlist

"The Sacred" by Yaima

"Just Let it Go" by India Arie

"Beauty in the World" by Macy Gray

"Calling all Angels" by KD Lang

"I am Light" by India Arie

"Halo" by Ana Brun

"Bowl of Light" by Trevor Hall

"Heavenly Day" by Patti

"Give Thanks" by India Arie

"Black as Night" by Nahko and
Medicine for the People

Follow me on Spotify (@carrieschmitt) to listen
to this playlist!

I bought Rosie at the end of my Year of Roses Project, which involved giving a rose to a stranger every day for a year. As this special project came to an end, I wondered how I would continue having these heartfelt daily interactions with others that I had grown to look forward to each day. The first person to climb onto my bus was a teacher from my daughter's school. As we talked about the end of the Year of Roses Project, he said, "Your bus is your rose to give to others now." His words felt like a blessing, and I knew what he said was true. *Rosie is meant to be shared — she is for all of us.* I welcome anyone who wants to tour the bus to come aboard and share stories of art and life with me as a way to stay connected with others, which became a spiritual practice for me during my rose-giving project and a key part of being connected to the divine creative force that surrounds us and lives within us all. ▶





The most exciting part of my day is waking up and asking, “Where do I want to paint today?” Some days I drive to a nearby beach to work, some days I choose an urban setting bustling with energy, and other days I find a remote spot surrounded by the towering evergreens the gorgeous Pacific Northwest has to offer. *Rosie is a reminder that sometimes limitations can lead us to our most creative ideas and greatest blessings.*

Carrie Schmitt is an artist and author who lives in the Seattle area, and believes in the transformative power of art. She offers art retreats and workshops to share her love for the creative process. Learn more at carrieschmittdesign.com, on Instagram (@carrieschmitt) and Facebook (Carrie Schmitt Art and Design), and by contacting carrie@carrieschmittdesign.com.

Photography by Michael Sladek. Learn more at msladekphoto.com.



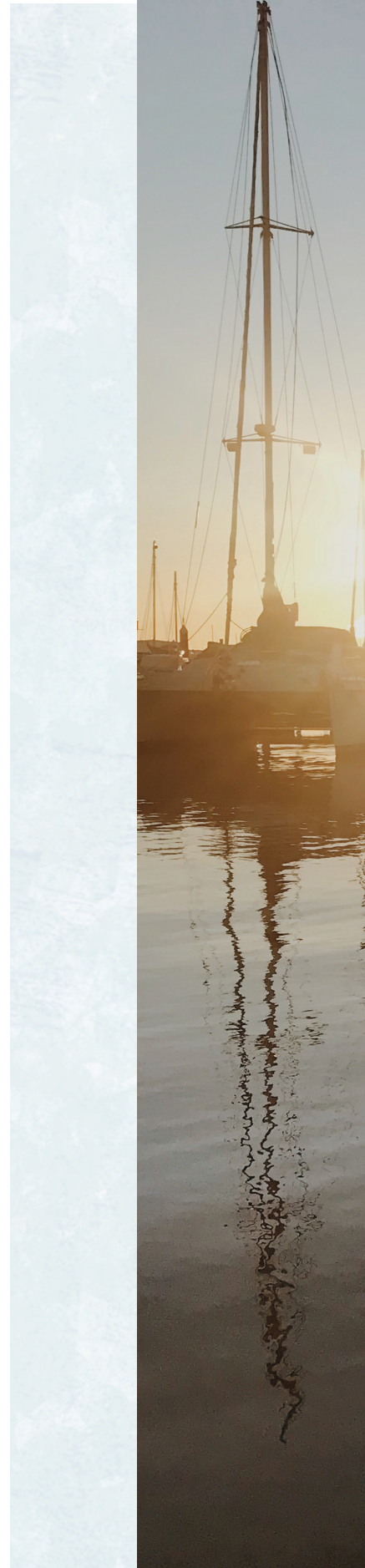
My Floating Studio

BY HANNAH O'BRIEN

My identity as an artist and a sailor have traveled parallel winding paths along the course of my life, so it feels fitting that they would eventually veer inward and collide. Somehow, what began as summer jobs and side hobbies took over my life with a full, sweeping force. The story of my arrival in the present moment — creating art in the cozy cabin of my sailboat, which I live aboard — is full of winding turns and chance encounters. Though it has required plenty of hard work and challenging moments, I like to think that I let the wind herself blow me to where I am today.

I have always been an artist, and I've fit creativity into my life regardless of what else I had going on. My life is highly dictated by seasons. Summers are fairly consistent, working as a sailboat charter captain, but winters are always a bit more flexible. For many winters I traveled and found jobs to fill my time and support myself financially until the following spring. This lifestyle led to a series of makeshift studios in numerous living situations: a little apartment in icy Portland, Maine; a sweet cottage on the beach in Sandy Ground, Anguilla; and the dusty loft of the boat shop in Georgia, Vermont. Though I've fit an artistic practice into my life in some way throughout the years, I always knew I wanted to take it further. Finally, this past fall I decided to dive into a more full-time lifestyle with art and turn it into a business.

I've lived aboard my sailboat, Phoenix, for two years now. Setting up a studio space in her cabin required a bit of creativity and more thoughtfulness in terms of materials and supplies. Boats have a limited amount of water, and anything that goes down the drain goes straight into the ocean, so I have to be much more conscientious about that; for example, I use water-soluble ink so I can use baby wipes for cleanup. Organization on board is also a constant battle. I've given up one of my few clothing drawers to hold art supplies. My quarterberth (the aft bunk that can best be described as a small guest room) has become dedicated to shipping materials. I've used strong sail-making twine to hang a line across the middle of the boat to dry my work. And perhaps most importantly, I've had to pivot in the type of pieces I make. ▸





PHOENIX

CHARLOTTE, VT



Throughout the years and the makeshift studios, I've bounced between numerous mediums, from collage, to oil paint, to charcoal drawing. I enjoy switching things up and experimenting with new materials and combinations. When I got more serious about selling my art, and I realized the challenges in setting up a studio on board, I knew I would have to get more particular in my medium of choice. Linoleum block printing was something I had experimented with in high school, and the idea of an image that could be reproduced by hand fascinated me. After a couple of experimental designs, I completely fell in love with it. Block printing involves very stark lines of positive and negative space to create an image, which presented me with an interesting challenge after spending so much time with mediums that involve gradients. The challenge along with the beautifully unique aesthetic hooked me completely.





While in port, I have everything set up on Phoenix's salon table, and while sailing it all gets tucked away in hidden lockers. *One of the most beautiful things about having my art studio on board is that it will travel with me wherever I go.* In fact, when this magazine issue is published I will be sailing north, with all but a sketchbook and pen stowed away for the voyage. As we travel, I hope to capture some of the inspiration that Phoenix steadily whispers to me — inspiration I know will show up later in my work.

Part of the inspiration I get from Phoenix comes from the confidence she has given me. Being a woman in the sailing industry can be extremely challenging at times. I take a lot of pride in the sailing career I've built, and that works its way into the work I create in my studio. I also feel so unbelievably grateful to be surrounded by so many other badass women sailors who have supported me along the way. Witnessing their strength and grace serves as an incredible inspiration in my artistic practice. ▸



My Top 10 Favorite Doodle Prompts to

Get Through a Creative Rut

1. A really scary monster
2. Funny vegetables with faces and personalities
3. Animals in different costumes
4. A butterfly with very intricate wings
5. Invent your own bird
6. Create a flag of an imaginary country
7. A map of the area you live in from memory
8. Futuristic cars
9. A bunch of potted plants
10. Sea monsters



Living aboard forces me to live a life that is particularly in tune with nature, especially the weather. A calm day on a sailboat is so many worlds away from a high-wind day, so while I try to keep some routine, oftentimes Phoenix and I have conflicting schedules. Though all of my actual printmaking happens down below at my salon table, much of the sketching and planning happens up on deck. I love to hang out on the foredeck with my cat, Roger, watching the birds and enjoying the reflections of the other boats on the calm water. With my upcoming change in location and change in weather, I'm excited to see how that is reflected in my art.



Like many artists, I am all too familiar with feeling lost: sometimes it's questioning what my next piece will be, sometimes it's questioning the purpose of my art, and sometimes it's actually questioning whether the life I'm living is the one I want. These questions are normal, and when I start to feel overwhelmed by them, I turn to Phoenix. She reminds me of both the unbelievably beautiful moments we've had together and of the lowest and darkest emotions she has inflicted on me. *And as she bobs in the water, she reminds me that a boat can't sail in flat, calm water — for us to move forward, we need the wind, and the wind creates waves.* The ups and downs of the waves that the universe serves us are a necessary part of life, and the only way to make sailing through them easier is experience behind the helm. So as I ride out the trough of the wave, I remind myself that the only way to get to the crest is to keep going.

Hannah O'Brien is an artist as well as a live-aboard sailor and licensed USCG captain. From her sailboat she runs svPhoenix Studio, specializing in printmaking. You can see more of her work and read her story at hgobrien.com or follow her on Instagram (@sailingvessel_phoenix). She also welcomes email at hannahgob@gmail.com.

Photography by Hannah O'Brien.





A SCOTTISH CASTLE BECOMES AN *Art Studio*

BY KAREN CAMPBELL

I've had a long-standing obsession with Scotland ever since a college backpacking trip led me to Edinburgh in 1996. Since that time, I haven't been able to remove the country from my head or my heart. In 2017, I returned to its mystical mountains and shores for a traveling art retreat — it only made matters worse and my obsession more acute. A year later, I returned with my husband and three children so they could have a taste of the land I would love to call home.

Thankfully, my children understood my connection with the country, but my husband, who is a bit more pragmatic, wouldn't hear of another imminent return. Fed up with my incessant talks of returning, one night he suggested, "If you're so in love with Scotland, why don't you set it up so that you have to go back every year? Run your own annual art retreat!" Before he finished the sentence, I strode over to my computer and typed a message to my talented (and, of course, Scottish) artist friend, Lucy Brydon: "I'm coming to Scotland to do an art retreat! You in?" In a few seconds, I read her positive simple reply, and that was that.

We started discussing the venue. As a joke, Lucy suggested we check out a castle close to her home known as Wardhill Castle — a restored 900-year-old, eight-bedroom historical treasure. The castle has gained attention lately, as it belongs to the Leslie family. If you're a "Game of Thrones" fan, you would recognize Rose Leslie who played Ygritte on the show and recently married her "Game of Thrones" costar Kit Harrington at Wardhill Castle. Being a huge fan of the show, I nearly fell out of my chair when Lucy told a story of running into Kit Harrington at the castle's Christmas tree event the previous winter. Without high expectations, I researched the castle as a possible venue location, and, just like that, I rented it for an entire week last summer. ▶



Around the same time, I began a friendship with artist Jenny Manno. We hit it off after meeting online, and I knew her talents would be a huge asset to our blissful week in the Scottish countryside. Jenny, Lucy, and I each have different strengths and styles; we could offer the best of our artistic techniques to the lucky few who attended. We each planned to teach a full day of watercolor and art journaling techniques, and vowed to keep our lessons a complete surprise, both from each other as well as from our guests. That decision heightened our anticipation and allowed the teachers to be students as well.

Planning took the better part of a year and full coordination by the three of us. Jenny was in charge of the food and coordinating with the caterers — no easy task since 11 out of 16 women had restricting diets. Lucy was in charge of the two excursion days, including travel to the local castles, restaurants, and shops. I was in charge of filling seats, registrations, the marketing website, brochures, and the business side of things. And each of us brought a different set of artistic skills to bestow upon our guests during the retreat.

To make this retreat an exceptional, once-in-a-lifetime event, we pulled out all the stops. We kept the guests sequestered in a small room while we waited until everyone arrived to build anticipation of what was to come. Slowly, we introduced them to the first floor but not without a proper wine and cheese spread in the grand foyer. Instead of leading our guests to their rooms, everyone mingled while exploring the upper floors of the castle. *We stayed behind to film and take photos, giggling to ourselves as we heard their squeals of delight as they discovered the grand bathrooms, bedrooms, and long enchanted halls.* Jenny designed pencil pouches that we placed on each pillow, gifting our guests with handmade watercolor kits, a watercolor print of the castle, handmade earrings, Scottish cookies and whisky, and other assorted treasures.

We knew that serving 16 people for the week would be a lot of work, so to make sure we focused on the art and experience, we hired caterers to serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The meals were phenomenal, and we were impressed to learn that the same company served the Harrington wedding as well as the Queen when she summers in Aberdeen!

In addition to our three days of art instruction, we hired a coach bus to explore the local fishing villages and nearby castles. We discovered quaint beaches as well as vintage book and antique shops. We sampled the local Scottish fare and relaxed at cozy pubs. I think we could all agree that the highlight of the trip was when Lucy spontaneously shouted “Stop” to the bus driver. It was getting dark outside, so she ushered us to hurry as she barreled straight into the woods. Confusion turned to awe when we suddenly came to a clearing in the middle of the forest. An ancient stone circle awaited us. Many of us felt strange, pulsing vibrations coming from the rocks; it was both horrifying and electrifying, and a moment we will not forget. >



TIPS ON TRAVELING WITH *Art Supplies*

- Invest in watercolor markers (my favorites are by Winsor-Newton). They are so lush on their own, but you can run a wet brush over them for a true masterpiece! These markers travel with no mess and won't explode during air travel like fountain and brush pens tend to do.
- Use a baby food jar to store water in for refilling water brushes. It's watertight and small enough to pack away in a purse yet large enough to refill a water brush a few times.
- Choose a journal that is large enough that you can draw comfortably but small enough that it will fit in your purse. Keeping it in your purse increases your chances of getting it out and using it!
- Bring along felt-tip pens. They are very water-soluble and inexpensive, and when combined with a water brush you can use them to paint to your heart's content. The best part is that you can store a dozen and a water brush in a tiny pencil pouch.
- Invest in a Blackwing Pencil. Although expensive, a single pencil is the equivalent to carrying an entire pencil set! It can make light marks, dark ones, and every value in between.





Every moment of the retreat was a gift. We loved it so much that we have decided to make this an annual event. We will not change a thing except to refresh the lessons, explore new castles and sites, and stay a wee bit longer. Perhaps you will be lucky enough to join us one year!

Karen Campbell is a mixed-media artist living in North Carolina, with her husband, three boys, and three cats. She is a full-time artist, instructor, and author of 12 art instruction books. She offers paid courses through her online art school (awesomeartschool.com) and posts weekly art lessons on her two YouTube Channels. To learn more about the retreat, her online classes, and books, visit karencampbellartist.com. You can watch Karen's video of the retreat at bit.ly/castlereetreat.

Photography by Karen Campbell, Jenny Manno, and Lucy Brydon.



Capturing Portraits & Stories ACROSS AFRICA

BY EMILY SHEFF

From a young age I dreamt of traveling the world equipped with not much more than a backpack full of camera gear. My feelings toward creativity and photography always centered around getting outside my comfort zone and confronting and documenting the lesser known.

Fast-forward a couple of decades and I'd received an opportunity to travel vast parts of Africa in an overlanding vehicle. I was happy living in northern Canada where I worked in communications and marketing, and ran a part-time photography business on the side, but the voice of my youth lingered softly in the back of my mind, whispering, "This is your chance."

Creatively I've always been drawn to portrait photography for its ability to encourage honesty, vulnerability, and bring humanity closer together. Equipped with this passion, I decided to leverage the trip to create a portrait project extending across Africa. Inspired by the lack of positive stories about Africa in western media, I made it my goal to help challenge Africa's negative stereotypes through the art of portrait photography and storytelling. I coined the initiative "Face of Africa Today," purchased a web domain, and moved into a 2011 Jeep Wrangler outfitted for overlander life. This vehicle would become my "studio" on wheels for the next year and a half. ▸







While the setup was most certainly minimal compared to a typical photography or editing studio, with the Jeep I had everything I needed to sustain my artistic exploration into travel portrait photography. My gear required a large and secure storage area, so the jeep was equipped with steel lockboxes installed in discreet locations throughout the vehicle. For a work space where I could catalogue, edit, and write, I moved around depending on the day. If we were established for the afternoon at a makeshift bush camp, I worked from the comfort of a hammock, often observing zebras or giraffes nearby. Other days I settled into my rooftop tent, which had removable tent flaps to allow the natural environment inside. Most of my creative work was done, however, from a simple folding table and camp chair, which I placed near the vehicle's solar-powered electrical outlets to plug in my laptop and recharge camera batteries.

I lived with the natural cycle of each day, waking with the sun and sleeping when darkness fell. My partner and I drove for days and months on end to reach remote communities and cross new borders in search of subjects and stories that would reveal a fresh African narrative. I soaked in Africa's diffusion of cultures at concerts and festivals, and set off on safaris with highly trained conservation officers and guides. No matter where I went, I was met with the inspiration to photograph someone new.



To capture over 250 portraits in 16 countries and maintain a consistent creative style throughout the entire series, I used the same camera, lens, off-camera flash, and soft-box to complete each portrait. I often hired a local guide to help with translation and to uncover unique stories, and I always had my iPhone handy to take notes or record an audio interview, which I would use later to compose a story to accompany the portrait. To hold my light source, I started out traveling with a lightweight stand, but soon opted to ditch the extra equipment and enlist the help of a local instead. This made the shoot more inclusive and often brought the community into the experience.

Since taking my first creative leap into travel portrait photography in Africa, I've learned that the artist's studio can take many shapes and forms; a studio means something different for everyone. *While the Jeep provided a roof over my head, a place to cook and work, and securely store my camera gear, I soon discovered that my true studio, where I derived the energy and inspiration to search for and capture authentic African stories, was Africa itself.* Sometimes, to live out a creative dream, you have to be brave and trade in the brick and mortar of a permanent space for a sense of adventure and a well-packed camera case. ▸



Must-Have Travel PHOTOGRAPHY GEAR

- Full-frame DSLR camera body:
Canon 5D Mark III
- One high-end mid-focal length lens:
Canon EF 24-70mm f2.8L II
- One off-camera flash with
high-speed sync capability:
Canon 600 EX-RT speedlight with
the ST-E3 wireless transmitter
- Soft-box kit for a speedlight flash
- Two hard drives capable of rugged
travel: LaCie 1TB Rugged Mini Portable
Hard Drive
- 13-inch Macbook Pro
- Additional camera and video gear

My portrait initiative wasn't bound by four studio walls — it was broadened with every local's extension of kindness, new language learned, or frontier explored. On any given day, there was no limit to how far and wide I could explore in search of my next great portrait subject — granted there was gas in the tank, of course.

Emily Sheff is a travel, wedding, and lifestyle photographer based in the Yukon in northern Canada. While traveling on a year-and-a-half journey through Africa between 2016–2018, Emily completed a large-scale portrait photography series called Face of Africa Today, featuring portraits, stories, and videos from 16 countries across the continent. Visit faceofafricatoday.com or Instagram (@faceofafricatoday) to browse the multimedia initiative.

Photography by Emily Sheff.





Follow Your Own Way

BY ELIZAVETA RUKAVISHNIKOVA

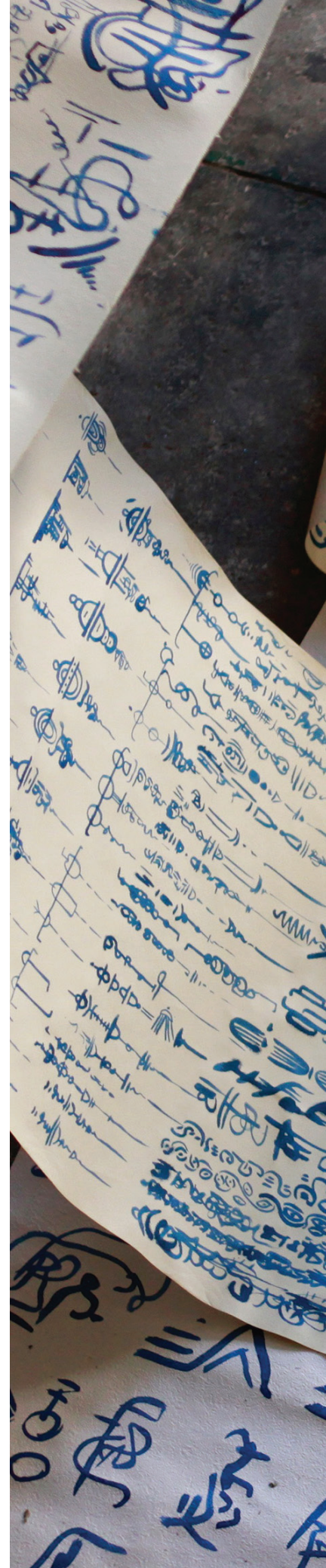
My life itself is art, and my path has always been an adventure. Being creative is my nature and has been a regular part of my life since childhood. I'm a full-time artist and exhibit my works in galleries and art fairs. For the past two years I have lived and worked in my studio in Nugget Square in downtown Johannesburg, South Africa.

In my studio I create worlds through my art. Currently, I am working on a body of work that is an installation titled "100 Meters of Eternity." I create upon scrolls that visually describe unknown realities and the possibility of other worlds. I believe it is very important to listen to yourself and follow your own way — this is the ethos behind my work. ▸



My studio is a spaceship I use to travel to distant worlds. It is very peaceful and meditative yet at the same time it is a space of production. When I moved into this building, my only goal was to create. I have separate areas for my work: Upstairs is dedicated to smaller bodies of work, and there I have my favorite drawing table. My bedroom is also located upstairs. Downstairs I create bigger works and sculptural pieces. The kitchen and dining area are also downstairs. *My art is what makes my studio special and keeps the energy moving, but I also have items in my space that are special to me.* My piano is a tool that helps me express myself. I also have a couple of momentos I brought from Russia, which are very sentimental to me and help me survive moments of homesickness: my grandmother's photograph and a woolen shawl from my very good friend Julia. >







My current setup is perfect for me because it is a special place. Within my studio there is a very good atmosphere that encourages my creative process. Due to its size, I have the ability to look at my works from a distance. My new installation pieces also require a lot of space, so I'm lucky I can hang them from the high ceiling and on the large walls. Since I live in my studio, I am able to work at any time of the day or night. There is a very comfortable courtyard outside where I can enjoy a short walk or visit my neighboring artists for a cup of coffee. *Even if I didn't have this particular studio, I would still be making my art — art comes first.*

The biggest challenge for me here is it gets very cold in the winter, and it is absolutely impossible to keep the studio warm, as it has a massive metal roof. But, luckily, the African winter is not very long and I find myself more productive on cold days. Also, my studio is situated in a pretty dangerous part of town, so quite often I hear gun shots coming from the streets, which can be a little disturbing. However, that said, it's something that comes with the reality of this world and causes me to think about the value of life more.

Usually when I'm working, my studio becomes a total mess — as my grandmother used to say, "Demons will get lost in there!" I don't worry about storage because my main focus is to make art. I put my things all over the place wherever it feels comfortable for me. When I realize that I'm getting buried by the mess, I start cleaning and organizing. When you are a full-time artist, you don't always have time to keep everything permanently tidy because the creative process takes over. >

My routine every day is to wake up, get to work, and eventually go to sleep. I work every day and hardly take weekends. My biggest problem is exhaustion, but my ideas and creativity keep flowing. I get very upset when I can't keep working, and it's difficult to switch off and stop thinking about what I'm going to do next. When this does happen, I either stay in bed, watch a movie, or go out.

I don't think there is a particular formula when it comes to setting up a studio — it usually comes down to good luck and miracles. It's important to find a place that fits your needs and will be suitable for your budget. Finding a studio is a creative process itself; you never know what you will find and it's always an adventure. I started with very tiny places that were my everything: kitchen, bedroom, and studio, all in one little room. I never asked myself, "Do I want a studio?" I just created art in the space I had.

Don't worry if you don't have a space of your own — you do not need a studio to make art! *There are a lot of situations in life, and sometimes the most fantastic art is made in the most unexpected places.* The most important thing is to believe in yourself and your ideas, to be honest with yourself, and let the natural flow take over.





Elizaveta Rukavishnikova is a Johannesburg, South Africa, based artist from Moscow, Russia. She was educated at the State Teachers College in Moscow and also studied Arabic at the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Moscow. Her drawing and painting skills were recognized when she was accepted at the Moscow State Academic Arts College. Since settling in Johannesburg, she has participated in numerous group shows, including showing at the FNB Joburg Art Fair in the Kalashnikov Gallery booth. In 2017 she had her first solo show titled "Heart Attack," curated by MJ Turpin at Kalashnikov Gallery, Braamfontein. Elizaveta's work is in public and private art collections in South Africa, Russia, Latvia, Austria, USA, Germany, and Holland. She welcomes email at liza.rukavishnikova@gmail.com, and you can follow her on Instagram (@elizavetarukavishnikova).

Photography by Sarah Grace.