

Artists & Galleries / Pet Art

Paw Prints on Your Heart

ANIMAL LOVERS TIFFANY DNAKA AND DEBBY CARMAN CRAFT TREASURED PIECES OF ART DEPICTING THEIR CLIENTS' FURRY, FOUR-LEGGED FRIENDS.

By ASHLEY RYAN

For many, pets are a cherished part of the family. From man's best friend to mischievous yet playful felines, there is nothing like the love and loyalty of an animal. Laguna Beach artists Tiffany Dnaka and Debby Carman have their own unique styles, but one thing they have in common is the gift they give pet owners: art pieces that showcase their beloved animals in style.



Tiffany Dnaka (left) creates custom digital watercolor portraits of pets.

Wondrous Watercolors

Following the loss of her dog Moxey, Tiffany Dnaka was looking for an artist to create a watercolor portrait of her beloved pet, but struggled to find the style she was seeking. After her search repeatedly turned up empty, she decided to learn to do it herself.

Despite having no formal training, Dnaka explored the world of digital art to create her portrait of Moxey. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, she started making similar pieces for other people in her spare time and, when she lost her job in 2021, she decided to pursue her artwork full time and hasn't looked back since.

Her soft, romantic watercolor style makes Dnaka's pieces perfect for hanging in the home. "What I enjoy most is knowing that I'm helping the people purchasing it in some

way, either by helping a friend grieve a little easier by doing a custom pet portrait or just having someone who really admires their pet turn to my artwork as a way to cherish that love for their animals," she explains.

The digital nature of her pieces allows her to customize them from the comfort of her own home. "I do it all with my dog, Finn, by my side," she adds. Clients simply send over a photo and she personalizes it with her own style, with the option to add names or dates. The same artwork can also be placed on things like ceramic keepsakes, garden flags, keychains and greeting cards.

In addition to custom pieces, Dnaka partners with rescue organizations to help them find homes for the animals by donating artwork. "I always ask them to send me their most in-need dog that has been

sitting with them for quite some time," she notes. "And then the artwork goes to the person who adopts the dog." The organizations often use the pieces to gain attention for the pet in question as well.

So far, Dnaka has collaborated with more than 20 different rescues, including Barks of Love Animal Rescue, Pasadena Humane, One Tail at a Time, the Basset Hound Rescue of Southern California and more. She also created artwork locally for the Pacific Marine Mammal Center, which was sold in the nonprofit's gift shop.

"My mission is to help dogs [through my art]," Dnaka says. "... I think that's what sets me apart."

CUSTOM PET PORTRAITS BY TIFFANY DNAKA
949-734-0644; TIFFANYDNAKA.COM

COURTESY OF TIFFANY DNAKA



Debby Carman (above) paints colorful, whimsical pieces featuring dogs and cats.



Art With Heart

Stepping into the Faux Paw Artique is like immersing yourself in a dream world: Amongst the ornamental furniture and sparkling chandeliers, you'll find artwork crafted with whimsy and a pop of color.

"I like to say it's ... art with heart, because we all smile in the same language," says gallery owner and artist Debby Carman. "What I create, I think people respond to. They walk in the gallery and they have an emotional experience."

Decades ago, Carman owned a chain of flower shops in Newport Beach, but she decided she wanted to do something where she could be more expressive. Entirely self-taught, she started drawing cartoons of cats with feel-good affirmations. Later, she started specializing in dog and cat art, now creating everything from large-scale paintings and ceramic pet bowls to pillows, tote bags and books as part of Faux Paw Productions.

Carman has had a gallery in town for 30 years now, though the location has changed a few times. She also has a studio in Laguna Canyon where she makes and manufactures her pieces. She uses white porcelain for her ceramic bowls, which she shapes herself



on a pottery wheel, then fires, paints and glazes with a lead-free substance to ensure it is safe for pets to eat out of.

Because her work is mostly custom, she has her clients send in photos of their pets—whether for a bowl, treat jar or painting—and then she paints it in her own signature style. "I'm a whimsical fabulist, so it's my interpretation of a [pet] ... from the inside out," Carman explains. With vibrant colors and whimsical design, each and every piece is simultaneously cheerful and inspirational. "I look at them myself and I'm just kind of dazzled by them," she adds.

These personalized pieces can really be crafted on any material. Carman has even painted on things like surfboards and crafted small sculptures of peoples' pets.

Meanwhile, she also comes up with designs that appear on collars, leashes, tote bags and more as well as a line of stuffed dog toys based on the characters she created for her children's books.

While she says she doesn't have the same skill set as someone trained in the fine arts, she doesn't let that limit her, teaching herself new techniques and always expanding her creative spirit. But she says it's easy with such a fun subject matter. "I love the companionship and life lessons that dogs, particularly, teach us: compassion, responsibility, loyalty, devotion and care." ■

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