

Watercolorist Carol Carter Paints from a Bug's Eye View With "Small Intruders"

by Byron Kerman April 24, 2013



When did you see your first Carol Carter? You may not realize it, but you've probably seen at least one painting by the prolific area watercolorist. Stroll through enough living rooms in private homes in the area, and sooner or later you'll see an example from her lusciously colored oeuvre. Her series of swimmers, in particular, has really captured the local imagination. (Truly, the fact that she can live from selling her paintings alone, without having to wait tables as well, speaks volumes in this day and age.)

Her new series, "Small Intruders," consists of portraits of 100 different insects and arachnids in a small, 5.5 by 7.5-inch format. Carter has rendered an adorable ladybug, a moody aquamarine dragonfly, a gorgeous rainbow colored scarab beetle, dark and mysterious spiders, butterflies, moths, a scorpion, a praying mantis, a lightning bug, caterpillars, and plenty of others from the creep-crawly club.

So—why bugs?

"At one point I had this cicada in my kitchen," said Carter, "and I decided to paint it. People really seemed to respond to the painting, so for my holiday show last year, which is all small paintings, I did 15 more insects. At that show I noticed people really went for the insects. They sold in like 15 minutes."

The watercolorist decided to give the people more of what they wanted—a lot more.

Painting 100 insects is a process that can become tiresome, she admitted.

"I would say that by the time I got to my 80th bug, I was really tired of them," she said, "and I decided I needed to make the last 20 the most colorful of all, so I strove to make those even more precious."

Fans of Carter's skills know her trademark—substituting the colors of reality with wild, tropical hues from her imagination. (The combination of deep, Aegean-Sea blue and DayGlo orange, in particular, has served her well). Some of her "Small Intruders," like the caterpillar, the monarch butterfly, and the yellow jacket, are already brightly colored in real life. In her new collection, their eye-catching warning colors are that much deeper and lovelier.

"That's just how I see the world," explained Carter. "That's my strength—to seduce the viewer with beautiful colors."

Carter has collected the new insect images in a book for children, too. *Small Intruders: A Watercolor Journey Through the Bug Kingdom* will be available at the exhibition's opening reception (see below). Prints of the watercolors will also be hung at a special exhibition at St. Louis Children's Hospital in the autumn, she said.

So after painting 100 bugs, which are the artist's favorites?

"I really like the honeybee because he is so symbolic of everybody's love for bugs," she said. "I am also keeping the housefly. He was really popular on Facebook, he got shared a lot. He's buzzed all over the world."