

Darina Denali



P O R T F O L I O

PREVIOUS PAGE: *Sisters of the Stars*, by Darina Denali. Oil on canvas, 45 x 92cm

LEFT: *Turtle's Journey*, by Darina Denali. Oil on canvas, 100 x 50cm

Darina Denali



Queen of Camouflage, oil on canvas, 45.5 x 45.5cm (above), and *In Love*, oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm (left), by Darina Denali



Text edited by Gunild Symes
All artwork by and photos
courtesy of Darina Denali

Czech artist Darina Denali, now based in New Zealand, creates glorious, vibrant and dynamic paintings of marine life, capturing the curious behaviors of animals and sublime nature of the underwater realm. X-Ray Mag interviewed the artist to gain insights into her artistry and creative process.

X-RAY MAG: Tell us about yourself, your background and how you became an artist.

DD: I am a professional artist based in a little town called Russell in the

middle of the beautiful Bay of Islands in New Zealand. I live with my husband and my 10-month-old son. I originally come from the Czech Republic. I have always specialized in painting with oils, but after my son was born, I changed medium and started to use watercolors instead, as it better suits my new lifestyle. I also paint with acrylics when I work on murals.

My grandfather was an artist, and my mother enjoyed painting too. So I have always been encouraged to paint and draw as well. Ever since I can remember, I was the weird kid sitting in the corner of the day care center and drawing for the whole day. It was my most favorite thing to do then, and it still is now. Nobody was surprised when I made the choice to study art in college. I then graduated from a private school of design in Prague, where I studied oil painting for four years.

After graduation, I decided to ful-

fill my dream of traveling and living by the ocean. I moved to Cyprus, where I met my husband, and also painted my first marine life painting.

We lived in Iceland for two years, and later on, moved to New Zealand, where we finally permanently settled in one of the most beautiful diving spots ever, surrounded by stunning nature, diverse wildlife and always

smiling people.

I feel a deep connection to nature, the ocean and all living creatures. They inspire me every day, and I just wish to have four hands to give me more time to paint everything I would like to. I am grateful that I can express myself through my art and share it with like-minded people.

My artwork is represented by galler-





Little Seal, by Darina Denali. Oil on canvas, 60 x 50cm

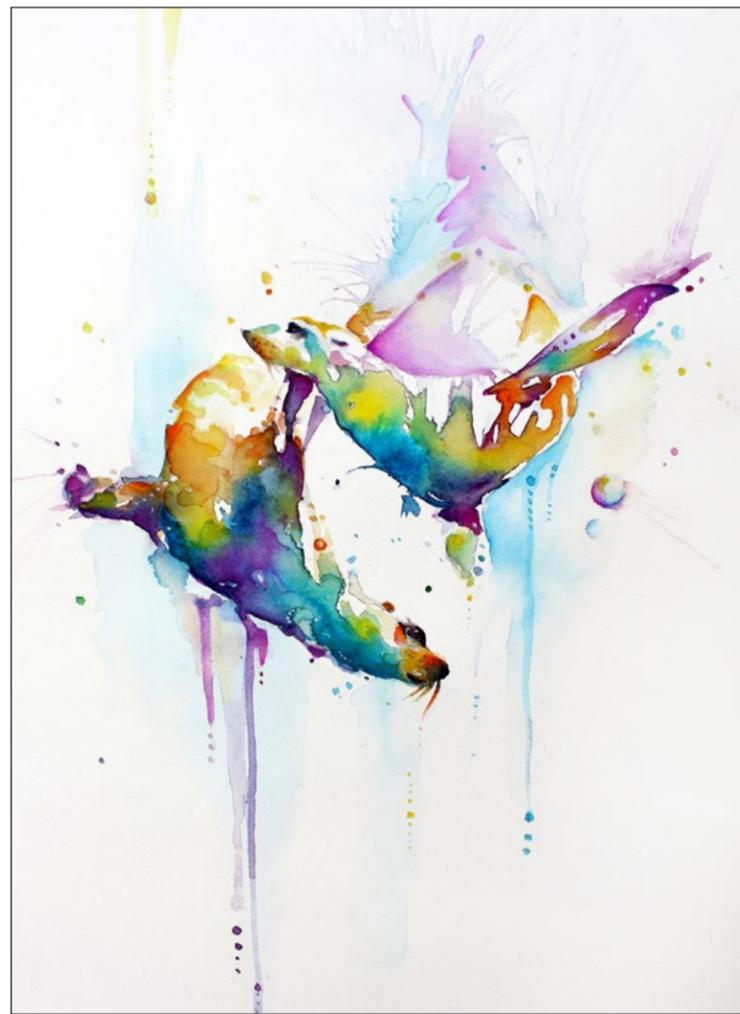
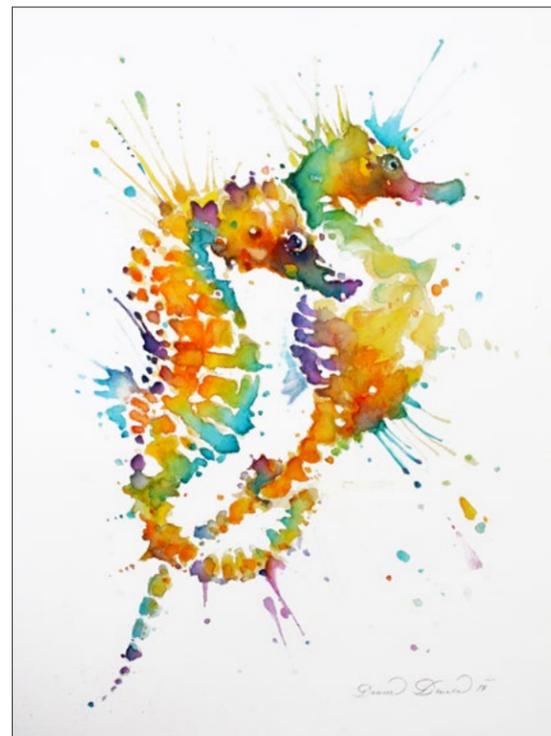
ies throughout the country, and many of my paintings are held in private collections around the world.

X-RAY MAG: Why marine life? How did you come to this subject matter and how did you develop your style of painting?

DD: Since I was a child, I have dreamed about the ocean. I kept saying to my family that one day I would live by the sea and swim with different ocean

creatures. Of course, they laughed at me, as we lived in a land-locked country and my parents only knew of the sea from photographs. But I always had this strong calling. And now, just the fresh smell of the ocean in the air calms me down and brings me a strange feeling of happiness.

I find underwater life very mysterious and fascinating. It is a different, almost surreal world, parallel to ours, full of incredible



Rainbow Seals, by Darina Denali. Watercolor on Fabriano 300g paper, 29.7 x 42cm

creatures. Once you start to learn more about them, the more admiration you will have for them. I find it impossible not to paint marine life.

My oil paintings, watercolors and murals featuring marine life are very colorful, with realistic detail. I found that reading and learning about each creature was very interesting. I always try to learn as much as I can about everything I am going to paint. I want to better understand what these animals are, by learning more about their anatomy, life cycle and behavior.

X-RAY MAG: What is your artistic method or creative process?

Darina Denali

DD: It depends on whether I paint with oils on canvas, acrylics on a wall (mural) or watercolors on paper, but once I am inspired and have a vision, I use Photoshop to create a mock-up, which most closely matches my idea. Then I sketch it on canvas or paper or on a wall. I sort of need to know what I am doing and what I am aiming for, but I still find lots of surprises in the final result.

X-RAY MAG: What is your relationship to the underwater world and coral reefs? How have your experiences underwater influenced your art? Where have you had your favorite experiences?



Pink Mao Mao, oil on canvas (above), and Soul Mates, watercolor on Fabriano 300g paper, 29.7 x 42cm (left), by Darina Denali



Just Curious? by Darina Denali. Oil on canvas, 100 x 40cm

DD: I am snorkeler. I am just too impatient to spend time with gear preparation to become a scuba diver. My husband is a very keen freediver, and we share our love for ocean.

I think that the most incredible experience with marine life that I have had was while snorkeling in Poor Knights. It is a marine reserve here in New Zealand, and I just could not believe how many beautiful, fully grown, very friendly and curious fish we could see there. It was literally a paradise. After this experience, I painted

a painting called "Underwater Cathedral" (on next page).

X-RAY MAG: What are your thoughts on ocean and freshwater conservation, and how does your artwork relate to these issues?

DD: I am a big fan of marine reserves, and I hope that there will be many more of them in the near future. I have seen what a difference they can make, keeping the ocean free of human beings

as predators in places like Poor Knights Islands or Goat Island in New Zealand. There, fish and crayfish have finally a chance to reproduce and fully grow. From others, I often hear the opinion that there is enough fish for everyone, and that we can just keep taking. I wish that there would be a less selfish approach. Otherwise, there is not going to be many fish left when our children grow up.

Shark finning, global warming, dumping of chemicals and debris in the ocean, overfishing, greediness... all this makes me

angry and sad, and this is not the sentiment from which my art comes. With my paintings, I focus on the positive, with the hope of fostering positive change. I intend to depict the true beauty and richness of the ocean through my art, and I hope that it will lead people to respect and converse about marine life. I do donate originals or reproductions to different organizations to help save the oceans and rivers.

X-RAY MAG: What is the message or ex-

perience you want viewers of your artwork to have or understand?

DD: I find it wonderful when people can relate to my art—when it reminds them of their own personal experience, or takes them on a virtual trip under the water's surface.

X-RAY MAG: What are the challenges and benefits of being an artist in the world today?



Face To Face
by Darina Denali
Oil on canvas
30.5 x 30.5cm

Darina Denali

Once clients start to take you seriously, and you gain some recognition, life gets much easier.

I absolutely love being an artist and my lifestyle. I think about new paintings and ideas all the time. I dream about them. I feel very excited and alive when working on each piece. I am very grateful for being able to make a living by just being myself, and doing what I love the most. This lifestyle can be very unpredictable at times, but I am happy to take the risk.

X-RAY MAG: How do people and children respond to your works?

DD: People, and especially children, usually like that I use bright colors. I have not met many children commenting on my oil or watercolor paintings. But I talk to children

when they watch me create murals on the street. They love all the ocean creatures I paint. It is amazing to see such excitement in their eyes and their love for the ocean and the animals.

X-RAY MAG: What are your upcoming projects, art courses or events?

DD: Currently, I am working on series called "People of Nature," which are futuristic portraits of people blended with different ocean creatures, birds or trees. These paintings represent our connection to the natural world, the living breathing ecosystem of which we are a part. ■

For more information or to purchase artworks, fine art prints and gifts, visit the artist's website at: Darinadenali.co.nz.

DD: Benefit? Definitely, social media. I love when people can see my art in person in galleries, but it is incredible how many people you can share your art with on social media, in a very limited time. And I really enjoy interacting on social media with people who are interested in my art. I can learn about who they are and hear their own life stories, too. I am very grateful for every person who takes the time just to look at my paintings, and I am happy that my paintings bring them joy. Some people purchase my art via social media and it always feels very personal. When people purchase your art through a gallery, most of the time, you do not know who bought it.

I think that the challenges artists have today are the same as they have always been. It can be quite tricky to make a living as an artist, as many people still see this profession as just a hobby. But being an artist is like running a small business, offering items people do not necessarily need.

Underwater Cathedral
by Darina Denali
Oil on canvas, 100 x 40cm



Tranquility, by Darina Denali. Watercolor on Fabriano 300g paper, 35 x 56cm