

# Amy KEEVER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEREDITH MASHBURN





**AMY KEEVER** is a native Texan who calls the Ozarks her second home, with her signature art gallery in downtown Bentonville, Arkansas. As a painter and mixed media sculptor, her love affair with glass has always been the foundation of her creative journey. When walking into her working studio and gallery, there is an immediate sense of comfort and freedom, with an informal mix of textured patterns and an environment saturated in color and light.

**I ALWAYS** tell people, “If you want to know what the inside of my heart looks like, just take a look around the gallery.”

For as long as I can remember, art has been my passion, but it took me a while to really own who I was and create the proper boundaries to fuel my creative journey.

From the age of 8, I sketched anything I could see. I moved a lot as a kid and art was always like a best friend that I could carry with me. In looking back, I think that constantly “starting over” in a new place was priming me to trust my instinct and go within and not be so dependent on my environment.

I dabbled in all types of art, but it wasn’t until I was a young mom that I found stained glass. My daughter, Kara, was 5, and my son, Haid, was 4 months old at the time, and I remember having to put him in a highchair across the room, and keep Kara entertained with colors, to be able to cut glass and keep them at a safe distance. I didn’t have the money to pay someone to do a table I had wanted — so I naively decided I would just do it myself!

Little did I know how long it would take, or how much I had to learn, yet that became my dining room table for over 16 years. That was it: I had found a medium that I fell head over heels in love with. And from that one piece, I found other mediums to incorporate and bring out my own style.

I wanted to major in art in college but was told that a business degree would serve me better, so I graduated from John Brown University (with two little ones, I finished up with night classes) with a Bachelor of Science in organizational management and a minor in marketing. Attending night classes



gave me the opportunity to have professors who had been in the business world for 25-plus years, and I learned so much from their real-life experiences.

Fast-forward to 2012: After having taught ESL, and working in finance, I found myself both fixated on creating — and exhausted. I was a single mom, staying up till 3 a.m. working on mosaics in a tiny room in my garage, then going to work at 7:30 a.m. ... One day I reached a breaking point and literally asked God to make the dream go away.

It sounds dramatic now, but at the time it was just painful to want it so badly and not have any idea how to get there. I laugh now that my bank job at the time wanted to fit me for their company uniform, but looking like everyone else surely pushed me over the edge! I felt misplaced, isolated and defeated. ... I remember getting a newspaper at lunch and deciding that I was going to find another job and close the door on dreaming.

I went back to work and the receptionist was on a call when another call was coming in. I picked up the incoming call and the woman on the other line said, “I’m a mosaic artist and someone has told me

“LOVE IS THE WHOLE THING.  
WE ARE ONLY PIECES.” — RUMI



there is a mosaic artist there and I’m trying to find her.”... I knew that was me. ... I also felt like it was serendipity.

Two weeks later, a piece of land that I had been paying on sold and I knew it was time for me to take a huge leap. I took that equity and quit my job and opened up my first studio. I was terrified — and also felt like it was the first time I could breathe. That studio was in Winnsboro, Texas, and wasn’t much bigger than a bedroom. There wasn’t a lot to work with, but I tried to curate the space so that each wall served a purpose for the art that hung there.

I knew I was a beginner in every way, but I started with a jewelry line and a variety of small

and large mosaic pieces. The universe seems to know what level you can handle, and this studio was about learning the day-to-day balance of life and marketing, while creating new works in series.

I was blessed to be celebrated by others who were encouraging me in my little East Texas town, and I’m so grateful for that phone call from Marianne Reavis, who is now an incredible mentor in my life and dear friend. My kids were always my biggest cheerleaders, even when I was doing it all wrong! They would hang out with me in the studio after school and help me prep things like adding labels to artwork or packaging it to ship.





**IN 2020**, I moved back to Northwest Arkansas, where my family is from, to watch over my mom, who was very ill with vascular dementia. I opened up a studio in Siloam Springs just as COVID was breaking out and found myself again feeling overwhelmed with how to make it all work and where to place my energy. We eventually got full-time care for my mom, and the country began to slowly get back to normalcy to some degree.

This was also such a beautiful time for me, as I met my incredible husband in 2020, and we married in 2021. Craig is a pediatrician, but is also a creative. He is an amazingly talented guitarist, and has such a special ability to boost my spirits when I overthink

things. Shortly after we met, my lease was about to renew in Siloam and I felt another shift coming and looked into the Bentonville area to get closer to collectors and a much more active art scene.

The first building we checked out is my current studio — as I walked in, it felt like déjà vu! For years, I had collected pictures and sketched what I felt my dream studio would be like — and I knew this was it! There would be a lot to do to prepare the space, but this 19th-century building, with its original tin ceilings and beautiful red brick walls, had an energy that was palpable. I had the best time looking for vintage furniture and old chandeliers and wanted the space to feel warm and welcoming.

I knew what felt good to me and let that guide me. I wanted to bring a sense of home, and infusing this with my abstract contemporary art worked so well. This was also when I introduced my paintings and began working in both acrylic and oils.

For years, I would use paintings to plan out my larger mosaics, and just kept practicing until I brought them to a larger scale. I paint the way I see glass, so it becomes layers and layers of yummy translucent colors.

At the same time, I started phasing out my jewelry. I plan to design a line in the future, but making so many smaller pieces took me away from the larger dimensional pieces that I love.





**I'VE LEARNED** that by being a business owner and an artist I do have to wear two hats; but when creating, I have to make sure I only wear one at a time. ... My biggest mistake, in the beginning, was letting the influence of needing to sell things creep into what I would create or who I was creating for.

I had to peel back the layers, which revealed the vulnerability that the work needed to speak to others. I had to be willing to seek out new information but stay close to my vision and protect it at the same time.

I make a vision book each year, which is an accordion book that holds all of my visual inspiration on one side and, when I flip it over, my written goals — and ways to step back and evaluate what's new that's coming out of my work, and find ways to nurture that.



I have been in this space for three years now, and I have found a schedule that really works well with the balance of running the business and creating art. Half of my week is spent doing private appointments with clients and private studio hours, and the rest of the week is open to the public. This allows me to really be present when I'm there. The private hours not only give clients that one-on-one time, but also allow me the ability to truly get in a flow with my pieces — as well as time to weld in another area of the space, so I can let the sparks fly!

Last year, I realized that to scale my business I needed to be able to build stronger, larger armatures, so I started welding the “bones” of my pieces and it is so fulfilling to be doing that part myself!





“LETTING GO GIVES US FREEDOM,  
AND FREEDOM IS THE ONLY CONDITION  
FOR HAPPINESS. IF, IN OUR HEART, WE STILL  
CLING TO ANYTHING — ANGER, ANXIETY, OR  
POSSESSIONS — WE CANNOT BE FREE.”

— THICH NHAT HANH





**ENTERING MY STUDIO** feels like a homecoming. Not really being from one town, I realize that this space provides that for me. It holds all the paths I've walked along the way — my history is represented here. I love displaying my art supplies on beautiful silver platters and pulling my paintbrushes from darling silver teapots.

I'm extremely sentimental, and since my mom loved costume jewelry, I keep it close by with my grandmother's china — sometimes just for inspiration and ways to display things, but I also include some in my sculptures. I still create on the desk where I did my first mosaics over 23 years ago, with the sweet notes my kids would write on it when they'd hang out in the studio with me.



I've started collecting chatelaines, which women carried in the 1800s, and look forward to the words and dates I might find in them. They become an interesting narrative for a piece. From time to time, I have a lock of a horse's mane and use it to tell the story of a pony that may have been rescued or had a special history.

I have jars and jars of Italian smalti, which bring me back to when I sang in Europe and saw it in the churches. I had not started working in glass yet, but it was so moving to see the expansive mosaics on the walls and the floors.

I love the quiet moments in the studio when it's just me and Charlie and Chaddie (my miniature parti schnauzers), but I also love when I have people stop in from all over the world and can hear their stories.

Bentonville is such a destination place and it's not uncommon to see collectors from New York to California. Many times, we end up sitting on the couches, visiting and talking about things they are curious about. Or maybe it's an artist who's needing some encouragement.

At the end of the day, I like to feel that my gallery isn't just about creating art and making money, but it's a place where everyone can feel loved and accepted just as they are and come away inspired to go do that thing that lights them up inside.

**More on Amy**  
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