



Realizing A **DREAM**

| By **ERIN SAUDER** |

St. Charles

artist Catie Barron sees the development of her path in life like the growth of a tree.

“The way we’re born and raised, that’s our trunk,” she says. “Then, we go off on a branch of our own. And sometimes, we only go so far and need to come back to the trunk to find out what it really is we want to be.”

Barron, 48, had to come back to her roots a few times before realizing her true self as an artist.

In high school, the Villa Park native was a member of an elite art club, and after graduation, she had hopes to attend the Art Institute of Chicago.

But when finances held her back, Barron instead went to Iowa State University in Ames for two years, studying architecture and graphic design, and painting on the side. After college, she found work in mortgage lending and banking, eventually taking on the role of vice president of LaSalle Bank in the 1990s before going into the private sector.

But a cancer diagnosis 13 years ago changed her perspective. “After the bout ended, I realized I had a second chance at life,” says Barron, now a cancer survivor. “I walked back down the branch to the trunk of the tree to realize what my true self was and what I really wanted to do with my life. It was always art.”

THE ARTIST’S JOURNEY

Barron finally was able to realize her dream of attending the Art Institute of Chicago, graduating in 2009.

Then, Barron’s husband and Harris Bank loaned her some



▲ (Above) Moonlit Moth **Photos provided**
▼ (Below) Lauren

commercial space in Libertyville for 90 days, and she opened a gallery and curated three different exhibitions, utilizing the work of artists from the Chicago metro area.

Barron also curated and managed the Auction Art Gallery for the American Cancer Society’s Discovery Ball in 2010. She put out a blind call for artwork across the country, and within 24 hours, had donations from artists as far away as California and New York.

“This experience was amazing. It showed me the power a collection of art can possess,” she says. “You can look at artwork, especially abstract, and have your own conversation with yourself about its meaning. However, when the artist includes the story of a loss of mother or the survival of a brother, it becomes some



discussion completely different.”

In 2010, her husband’s job took the couple from West Chicago to Wisconsin, and Barron transferred as an artist-in-residence to Cedarburg Cultural Center.

“The artists were so welcoming,” she says. “I was new, so I thought it would be difficult to fit in. But they’re all about promoting art. It was really refreshing to be in that environment.”

She and her husband were transferred back to the Fox Valley area a year later and landed in St. Charles.

Last July, Barron became a resident of Batavia’s Water Street Studios.

“It’s an amazing space,” she says. “I can’t say enough good things about the people there. I’m so excited to come back here and become a part of this.”

She also lauds the Fox Valley area as “a great place for artists.”

“That was the life I grew up in,” she says. “I was always putting my hands in the soil. I’ve always been very fascinated by flowers and the whole sense of their survival. They make themselves attractive so they can survive. I find that a funny dichotomy.”

Barron even pursued horticulture herself, studying at the College of Lake County before attending the Art Institute of Chicago.



▲ Boerners Daylilies

“I could tell even back then I was struggling,” she says. “I knew there was some other thing out there for me. It wasn’t finance and banking and accounting. There was something that pulled me, and I kept having to look and having to look. Horticulture was a little branch I had to go off on. And then I tried the art one. That’s been a really good one.”

Barron eschews the notion that art is gender specific, though she does see how female artists may feel more pressure than male artists to have a deep connection with their work.



▼ Catie Barron works on a painting.

THE ARTIST’S INSPIRATION

Barron draws inspiration from nature, particularly orchids.

“It used to be flowers in general, but now it’s orchids,” she says.

Her subject matter is not that surprising, considering Barron is the daughter of a father whom she calls a “huge flower gardener.”

Photographer



Kim Byrne

Last year, Kim Byrne, owner of KimberleeB Photography in Geneva, had to make a choice. Corporate America or her growing photography business. “I chose what fueled me,” Byrne said.

She began her photography business in 2007, while working in the Consumer Package Goods industry as a Sales Executive. “I was in corporate America for many years and did a lot of traveling.” Photography was a way for Byrne to express her creative side. “It was born out of my love for capturing images, but people saw my photos and started asking me to take pictures for them,” she said.

Byrne, a new member of the Geneva Chamber-of-Commerce, provides a wide variety of photography, from professional headshots to family portraits and weddings. “People are my passion!” she said



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Catie Barron
Artist

"I think we sometimes feel we need to have a deeper sort of connection for reasons to do our work rather than just create art for the sake of art," she says. "Sometimes, women feel it needs to be emotionally tied somehow. I'm not sure why we do that or if it's just part of female evolution."

She respects American artist Jeffrey Koons, known for his reproductions of balloon animals produced in stainless steel.

"You listen to an artist like Jeff, and he appears as though he's creating artwork for the sake of doing it, as though he's thinking, 'How much fun can I have with this?'" she says. "For me, it doesn't come with the deeper sort of, 'I do flowers because of who I am and what I identify with.'"

THE ARTIST'S DAILY LIFE

Most weeks, Barron spends about three days in the studio and one day on what she calls a field trip.

"I grab my camera and drive anywhere I think I can find flowers — botanical gardens, garden centers, orchid shows and other flower shows," she says.

And she's always looking for exhibition opportunities.

She's enjoying the celebratory feeling she gets from her line of work.

"It's a feeling of weightlessness, like I'm doing the right thing," she says. "Everything is aligning. It's pretty cool."

To learn more about Barron, visit www.catarzina.com. kc

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