

Nature, Art, and Surrealism



Amy Guidry is a Surrealist artist, a lifelong lover of nature with an interest in psychology, and a vegan. Guidry studied at Loyola University of New Orleans, where she received her Bachelor's degree in Visual Arts in 1998. While attending Loyola, she received the Loyola University Art Scholarship; a prestigious scholarship only awarded to one student per graduating class. Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries worldwide and private collections throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Asia. We spoke with Guidry about her creation process, her vegan journey, and how her interest in animals and the environment have shaped her work.

When did your interest in art begin?

I've been drawing and painting since I was a small child. By the time I started school, I was involved in art classes as well as the Talented Art Program. From quite a young age, I was concerned about the welfare of animals and had an interest in the natural world, and was drawing animals all the time.

A spotlight on vegan artist Amy Guidry

Artwork by Amy Guidry

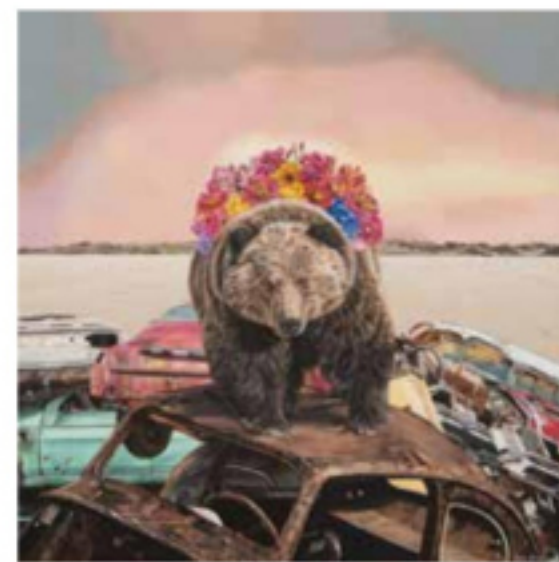


Can you share a bit about your vegan journey with us?

I started out as a vegetarian for about three years and gradually cut out dairy products before finally becoming vegan. I became a vegetarian after I was at my college library doing research for an Ethical Biology class and happened upon some books about slaughterhouses and agribusiness. I was shocked and appalled, looking for more books to the contrary, thinking this was a one-off. It wasn't. Over time and after more research, I decided to go vegan, which I've been for almost 23 years now.

How has being vegan impacted your art?

I've had an interest in animals and the environment since childhood. Even though animals and the natural world were usually present in my work throughout the years, I felt the need to up the ante. Art used to be something that I did for fun, not that it isn't enjoyable anymore, but it's done with more purpose now. I create art not just to bring attention to issues affecting the planet but to make people look at it in a way they never did before. I want people to connect to my work, to the subject matter, and see the similarities. See the expressions in their eyes and faces, see the movement in their bodies- all so similar to ours. See how all flora and fauna are connected and interdependent.



That's why I create art. It wasn't until my 40s that I realized that it's nature that I care most about, not art. Don't get me wrong- I love art. I love to look at art, to wear art, to live with art. I collect a lot of art- quite varied and often quite different from my own. But my love for nature is why I create my own art. I've been in love with nature for as long as I can remember. I create art because I want others to love nature, too. I create art because I want to save it.

How would you describe your art to someone who may not consider themselves an art expert?

I would say I take the unreal and make it look real, applying it to the natural world, creating surreal depictions of animals. That being said, no one should ever feel they need to be an expert to understand art. Art history gives you some perspective and context behind the emergence of certain styles, but it's personal experience that gives you understanding. You can see yourself in art created by someone you've never met. That can't be dismissed just because you never studied art. I love hearing how

someone sees their own life story or experiences in my work. It's fascinating how connected we are and just how small the world really is.



How do you decide upon the subject matter of a painting? Do you go into it with an idea of what you want to convey?

I always work out a concept on paper before taking it to canvas. The images I come up with are inspired by issues or events that I feel a need to cover through my work. Sometimes I'll hear or read something in the news and make a note. Others have been inspired by more personal encounters. I start out with thumbnail sketches of the basic concept behind a painting and I'll do upwards of 50 variations, if need be, on that concept until I have the right one. Even with an inordinate amount of sketches, they still revolve around the same theme, just different ways of conveyance.



Is there a piece of artwork of yours that is especially important to you?

Oh, that would be like asking me to pick a favorite child. However, I would say that *The Wild West* is a significant piece for me because even though my work is surreal, I had taken it to another level starting with this piece in my current series *In Our Veins*. I was in the middle of another body of work at the time but made a sketch and some notes and put it away for later. I had to get out of my comfort zone a bit, given that it was a more technically challenging piece, and I played with my technique a little. It was more demanding timewise, given the hours I had put into it as well.

What artists inspire you or your work?

Surrealists such as Salvador Dali, Frida Kahlo, and Rene Magritte have inspired me since I was a child. Really any dreamlike art has always been inspirational to me—even Botticelli's *Birth of a Venus*. I saw a print of it once in an antique shop when I was maybe 6 or 7 years old. I remember being fascinated by it, just awestruck. I stood there staring at it, and when I got home, I made my own interpretation of it. I made some changes to it, I don't recall them now, and unfortunately, that drawing was at my mother's house in Slidell during Hurricane Katrina, so it is no longer. I've always been drawn to the magical, the whimsical, and the surreal.

I'm also drawn to the work of Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, and Philip Pearlstein. Portraits and figure work appeal to my love of psychology. I'm fascinated by how they interpret their subjects, the settings they're in, the way they are painted, and their expressions.



What do you hope people take away from your art?

With each painting, my aim is for the viewer to have an inner dialogue with the work. Consider the message behind the painting and look inward to discover more about themselves and their role in the world. If the viewer can see themselves in the work and see how their impact on the world translates into this work, maybe they will be more conscientious of their actions and take steps toward positive change, change that can improve the world, help nature, and ensure it's still around for future generations. This connection to the work is the experience that I'm referring to. One that immerses the viewer into the work and resonates with them. Each painting is an opportunity to tap into not just one's visual perception but also their emotions, their memories, their fears, and their passions. If I can create a work that gets more than a fleeting glance at the wall, then there is this opportunity for the painting to converse with the viewer and create momentum.

Do you have a story you can share of a time your art brought the issues of environmental concerns and animal welfare to the attention of a viewer who may not have considered them before?

I had participated in *Animus*, a vegan art exhibition in London, and my painting *Mother Nature* was used as a promotional image for the show. The curator told me that someone had seen it and said right then and there that she was going vegan. Even though I want my work to resonate with people, I was still surprised and delighted to hear of her inspiration.

Do you have any projects you're working on or anything you would like to share with VEGWORLD readers?

I'm happy to announce I will be participating in WOW x WOW's upcoming online exhibition *MicroVisions 5*. It will open online on May 6th, and I will have a new painting featured.

Where can people find your work?

You can find my work in New Orleans, where I am represented by LeMieux Galleries. Also, my work can currently be viewed at Corey Helford Gallery in Los Angeles. And you can always find my work online on my website, <https://amyguidry.com/>

