



A Conversation with Kelly Thorn Dulka
By Valerie J. Christell, Gallery Director/Curator
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Alfons Gallery is pleased to join with Kelly Thorn Dulka in presenting her work in a virtual format. To replace our traditional opening reception Artist Talk, Kelly agreed to engage in the following discussion covering four categories:

Artist's Background

Christell: *Hi Kelly. Thanks for taking a moment to have this conversation about your work that's being presented in "Natural Inspirations." Would you first share a little about your background as it relates to your artwork?*

Thorn Dulka: *I was trained as a fine artist with a background in drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and photography, and self-taught in the mediums of colored pencil and gold leaf. In the early years, out of college, I designed custom and pattern stained glass windows for a local company. I eventually learned how to construct and build windows of my own. I have been working in this medium for nearly 30 years.*

This experience directly relates to my present-day work with colored pencil. Strong lines are the foundation of a stained-glass window as well as a colored pencil drawing. Strong lines are the foundation to a good work.

Christell: *Would you talk a bit about your journey through teaching yourself about colored pencil and gold leaf?*

Thorn Dulka: *I had a basic understanding of the use of color and layering because of a background in oil painting. Through exploration and practice with colored pencil techniques, I was able to become proficient and push to expand my abilities with this medium. Creating new colors, textures, and patterns is a matter of problem solving as well as understanding the relationship between the pencil and the paper.*



Thorn Dulka at work.

My current ability to work with gold leaf is definitely due to trial and error. I want a polished, flawless finish so I work up to 3-5 layers of gold leaf within a drawing. I try not to think about how much gold leaf I go through!

Intent/Form/Content

Christell: *What is your inspiration for these three series—in general, and in particular?*

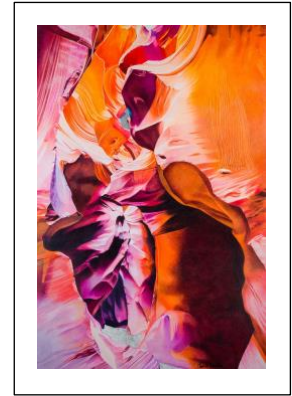
Thorn Dulka: *My works are about nature. I love nature, it makes me feel connected to God. What I produce is inspired by the relationship between nature and God.*

A love of composition, specifically color and strong lines, is also a major inspiration. I think that comes across in my work.

The Antelope Canyon work was the result of a photography trip and tour of the Upper and Lower slot canyons in Arizona. Being able to connect with the water carved walls, I was able to return inspired and create my latest series.

Christell: *What role does photography play in the look of the final works such as the Antelope Canyon series?*

Thorn Dulka: *I use the camera and lenses as a tool to capture what I imagine. By changing lenses and settings I was able to create enhanced colors for this series.*



Within/Antelope Canyon No. 5

Christell: *Where do you find your references from for the other series in this exhibit: Fish and Flower and Sea Life?*

Thorn Dulka: *The majority of my references come from trips researching and photographing nature at botanical gardens, Koi fish ponds and aquariums. I also experienced sea life first hand with my own 70-gallon salt water tank.*

In fall of 2019, I was able to observe and photograph turtles, fish, butterflies, and flowers in southern Florida. I haven't fully unpacked all the photos and ideas from that trip.

Christell: *While gathering these images, do you have a sense of how they'll come together, or does that combination process happen later in the studio?*

Thorn Dulka: *It's a little of both. Often times I'll be interested in a particular fish or flower and later work up thumbnail sketches. I pay attention to flow and movement of a composition. I try to think ahead about the finished piece and how the viewer will encounter the work.*

Christell: *How did the Asian design/feel come about in your work?*

Thorn Dulka: *People mention that my work has an Asian feel. It is unintentional. I think this result is the careful placement of the elements within a composition; a simple design combined with the use of gold leaf in negative space.*

I believe negative space is an important factor of a work; it allows space for the viewer's eye to flow from one object to another freely. It creates a kind of simplicity and delicate balance of a composition.

Recently, I have been photographing and working with Koi, flowers, and waterlilies, which adds to the Asian look.

Christell: *In your artist statement, you discuss your work with nature moving from realism to levels of abstraction and design. What motivates you to move into these different viewpoints as you work?*

Thorn Dulka: *I focus less on the overall image and more on internal design, especially with patterns and textures. As the viewer encounters a work, (let's look at Octopus 8: Life!) they see a realistic octopus and fish. Yet if they look beyond the surface, looking within, the viewer can see an abstraction of color, pattern and texture. Movement is really important, it creates a dynamic factor. The whips spiral off the octopus' tentacles creating movement, abstraction and chaotic design.*



Octopus 8: Life!/Sea Life Series

I try to create something fresh and new. So many incredible artists have created amazing works. One of my most favorite pastimes is touring museums and galleries. I want to draw upon the past and create something new. Colored pencil is a relatively new medium to work in.

Christell: *In speaking about “drawing on the past,” would you share an experience from one of your museum trips about how the artwork there, generally or specifically, impacted you?*

Thorn Dulka: *I have been fortunate enough to have travelled to museums in Germany, France, Italy and Greece as well as museums and galleries along the gold coast of California and southern Florida and most recently, in summer of 2019, to Washington D.C.*

I enjoy studying masterworks, especially paintings. I have a real admiration for artists' creativity and mastery of medium.

I would love to travel to Barcelona to experience some of Gaudi's architectural masterpieces.

Christell: *Is there one piece of artwork from the past that tends to stand out for you?*

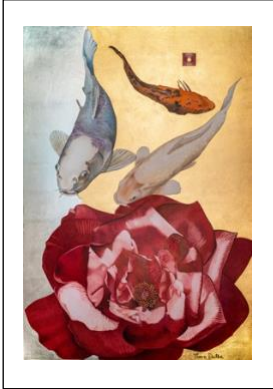
Thorn Dulka: *No, there are too many!*

Christell: *What role does gold leaf play in the meaning of your work?*

Gold leafing is an age-old process. Artists have been using this medium for hundreds of years, mostly on icons or embellishments to religious works. I use gold leaf as an integral part of a composition. When I see negative space, I see gold leaf. This creates a contemporary, and, yes, Asian look.

Christell: *It's intriguing that you see gold leaf in negative space. Can you explain how that works within your process?*

Thorn Dulka: *Negative space is an invisible element of composition. It is just as important as objects/subject matter of a drawing. One's eyes have room to wander or rest within a work. The use of gold leaf is planned out in a preliminary drawing. Sometimes I don't choose the colors (white, yellow, or red gold) until after the colored pencil work is completed.*



At the Gardens/Fish and Flower Series

Media/Technique

Christell: *What stimulated you to move into working with colored pencil and gold leaf; and what other media have you worked in?*

Thorn Dulka: *I found a book on colored pencil techniques that featured pencil drawings. I was inspired to try it myself. It is a great medium to work in—portable, clean, and easy set-up.*

I admire the Austrian painter, Gustav Klimt's work. He has a fresh approach to the use of the human form, curvy lines, patterns and designs. His use of gold leaf inspired me to try it in my works. I love that elegant polished look.

I have also worked in oil, chalk, and oil pastels. I left college thinking I would be a painter.

Christell: *Would you explain the "new techniques" in colored pencil that you mention in your artist statement?*

Thorn Dulka: *When the pencil meets the paper, it's magic. It is about the pencil meeting and working with the tooth of the paper. The basic idea of using colored pencil is layering. I've added a couple of techniques that I call rubbing and staining. The end result is a finished, polished painterly quality. I also use a variety of erasers. With the eraser I create lines, patterns, and textures that I would not be able to achieve otherwise.*

Christell: *How did you come to drawing on 4-ply museum board and adhering it to Masonite?*

Thorn Dulka: *This is a structure/technique that was created to maintain the integrity of the paper. Necessity is the mother of invention. I needed a thick, tough, flat surface to support the working of the pencil and gold-leafing techniques.*

Christell: *These large pieces are not for sale; instead, you're offering giclées in different sizes. Would you share a bit about these decisions and options?*

Thorn Dulka: *I have wanted to produce prints of my work for a long time but was not able to reproduce the gold leaf with luster and accuracy. Through trial and error and much experimentation, I've been able to produce high quality giclées of my artwork in-house. I'm really proud of this recent endeavor, with 30+ artworks to date to choose from. The majority of works are available in three sizes: 13"x 19", 18" x 24", 24" x 36" respectively. They are color calibrated and printed on the finest museum grade papers. These signed limited edition giclées come with a certificate of authenticity and a statement about the artwork.*

I create 4 - 5 drawings a year and this is a real way to share my work with others on a broader scale. [Giclées are being offered through Alfons Gallery as noted on the webpage.]

Christell: *Can viewers see more of your work on a website?*

Thorn Dulka: *I will have my website up and running by mid-January: www.ThornDulkaFineArt.com*

Future Plans

Christell: *As we close this interview, would you discuss your future plans with your art in terms of subject matter and media?*

Thorn Dulka: *This spring I will be travelling to Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons. I am hoping, through natural inspirations, I will be able to create a whole new series of drawings to unfold over the next few years.*

I will continue to work with sea life and on a large scale. Although, if I work much larger I'll have to pick up oil painting again. I think I've maxed out the size for colored pencil drawings due to matting and framing restrictions. Oil painting, hmmmmm. ...

Christell: *Thank you, Kelly, for this engaging conversation!*

Note: Kelly Thorn Dulka's Artist Statement can be found at the bottom of the exhibit webpage.
