

Sharon J. Harms

NASHVILLE, TENNESSE

Escape
oil on linen, 30x20

I'm inspired by manmade objects because they hold meaning that's connected to culture, history, beliefs and human experience. Objects reflect broad societal concepts while also activating deeply personal feelings. When I create still lifes, I like placing disparate objects together. First I choose an object that intrigues me, then intuitively place other objects around it with the intention of finding a story. Pulling from a collection of interesting items I keep in my studio, I leave in only what feels right and don't try to force the subject matter or composition. The stories that emerge from my arrangements are often a surprise, even to me. For *Escape*, I started with a desire to paint the glass horse figurine

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and the paradoxical symbolism of strength and fragility it represented to me. After discovering the 1960s Jane West action figure could sit on the horse, the rest of the objects in the composition fell into place.

I work from photographs in order to better study the minute details of each object. Even though I paint in a photorealistic style, I try to allow for fluidity in my brushstrokes in order to enhance each object's surface characteristics.

I didn't realize when I started working with the glass horse that *Escape* would turn out to be an extremely personal, autobiographical story. It was the first major painting I did after retiring from my career as an art director and graphic designer—a career that had defined my identity for nearly five decades. The demanding work often caused burnout, and I tried to leave it many times. When I finally did retire, I was ready to let go for good and move on to a new chapter in my life.

GOOD ADVICE There's no time limit on artistic expression. Everything in life contributes to whatever creative endeavor you wish to pursue. Embrace where you are and who you've become or are becoming. Tap into your own deep knowledge and personal experiences for inspiration. There's room in the art world for every kind of artist. Don't worry about whether your work will be considered fresh or embraced by the "right people." Find your authentic style through working on what you truly enjoy, and the right audience will find you.



MY ART STORY

I started working professionally as a graphic designer in 1973 at the age of 16 and went on to have a distinguished 47-year career as an award-winning designer and art director, working mostly for advertising agencies. Although I've taken a few introductory art classes, I'm basically a self-taught painter. I started painting in 2004, but my full-time job left little time to pursue it on a regular basis, and I produced only a few pieces before retiring in 2020. My work is heavily influenced by my experience in advertising, where every detail is labored over and crafted in a highly controlled way. Instead of creating brand narratives that are unambiguous, my personal work leaves room for viewers to work out the meaning for themselves.

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