

## FROM NATURE TO SCULPTURE: AN ARTIST'S JOURNEY

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I have always lived and worked near forests and water. My inspiration has always been drawn from nature.

I grew up and now maintain property in a county in Michigan that boasts 356 lakes and 46 trout streams. Almost half of the property in the county is state or federal recreation land.

From our log cabin in Michigan that my husband and I constructed in the 1980's (from cutting the trees to final trim), a creek is visible that flows from springs and eventually empties into the Pere Marquette, a national scenic river, several miles away. The roots of cedar, tamarack, white pine create a network of bridges through the bog along the creek. Growing along the stream are carpets of sphagnum moss and a diverse variety of plants, including the sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*. I recall picking wild cranberries in the bog near our home in Michigan and being extremely careful not to step on the pitcher plants, *Sarracenia purpurea*.

I have a BS in art from Grand Valley State University and have been doing art since then in one form or another. After graduation I held mostly seasonal jobs to allow myself time to do my art. I worked as forest fire fighter for the US Forest Service for several years, locally and participated in two fire campaigns in the western US. With my husband, I co-managed a 36-ha, 100-site, USFS campground adjacent to the Nordhouse Dunes Wilderness along the shore of Lake Michigan.

During and after working the campground life, I established and operated an art gallery to show my artwork and the pottery made by my husband, Dale Simmons. We also featured around 25 area and regional artists. After 25 years, we closed the gallery in 2017.

It was in 2001 we decided to split our time between Michigan and Mississippi. We found the beauty along the coast conducive to creating and selling our art. We purchased a fixer upper, made it livable and then Katrina hit. We were luckier than most, however. We lost most of the contents of our home because of flooding due to the unprecedented surge. We were able to clean, paint, repair, and replace. It was during this time that in order to escape the devastation, we would take drives north, in the countryside, away from the hurricane zone. During one of these excursions we found an area where hundreds of yellow trumpet pitcher plants (*Sarracenia alata*) grew along the highway. It was such a bright sight contrasted with the horrible devastation on the coast.

Living part time on the Mississippi coast, we have discovered several locations where carnivorous plants thrive. Another favorite species, I have yet to create, is the candy stripe quality of the white-top pitcher plant (*Sarracenia leucophylla*). We found these along the Clear Creek Trail near Milton, Florida. The Crosby Arboretum in Picayune, Mississippi is another great spot to find pitcher plants. The Dead Tiger Creek Savanna has two species of pitcher plants and their hybrids.

Several years ago, I began crafting 3D forms of my watercolor paintings. Among the many images I have used, carnivorous plants offer the most interesting of forms. In addition to my own paintings and 3D creations, I design and apply the imagery on my husband's wheel thrown raku pottery. These images include pitcher plants, sundew, jack-in-pulpit, and a variety of other designs.

I begin each sculpture by making a form. It is fashioned either from paper mache, paper clay, or stiff card stock. Once I have the form created, I cut up reproductions of previous paintings I have done and cover the form using the technique of decoupage. I will either take complete parts of the reproduction or take random pieces that match the local color of what it is I am covering. The result will not be exact, but a suggestion. I add components that may or not be growing alongside the main plant or form. For example, to suggest sphagnum moss, I painted sweet gum balls. Sometimes the



Figure 1: Assembling components for paper sculptures, Jack in the Pulpit and Yellow Water Lilies (left); wheel thrown Raku vase by Dale Simmons with pitcher plant design and application by Pamela Tripp (right).



Figure 2: “*Sarracenia purpurea*”, approximately 33 × 23 cm, original designs on printed paper, paper mache, sweet gum balls, and Masonite (left); “*Sarracenia alata*” approximately 33 × 23 cm, original designs on printed paper, paper mache, and Masonite (right).

leaf shapes I add are funky designs that would never be found in nature, but give the idea that it does when adjacent to the main form.

I am always looking for unusual plants that have textures or forms that would translate in paper form in an interesting way. I am not concerned with a photographic representation but more with creating an artistic interpretation, leaving the imagination to fill in the blanks.