

Nelia Harper French

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MacRostie Application – Artist in Residence July 2025

Statement

As an artist-in-residence, my goal is to create new life-size portrait/figurative oil paintings, connect with the public and provide local artists an opportunity to practice portrait drawing/painting from life.

When I was a previous recipient of Macrostie's Artist in Residency opportunity, I found that having a large studio space and being able to interact with other artists and visitors was extremely valuable. I enjoyed engaging with people during the First Friday Art Walk, providing interactive art opportunities for visitors, and having a large space to create.

I am currently finishing three large figurative pieces for a solo show at the Edge Center for the Arts in Bigfork, MN this July, along with new figurative landscape pieces for a two-person show at the Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery in October (funded through a Creative Individuals Grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board). My goal is to complete a body of work to present locally or for future shows and competitions.

While the first ten years of my artistic career were focused on landscape painting and studying still life and portraiture, I have shifted my focus over the past two years to portrait and figurative work, particularly as it relates to our local landscape.

My process varies with the seasons as much of my work is created through direct observation and painting from life. As a classically trained artist, I alternate between working with models and creating studies in the studio, working outdoors on location, and combining observation and imagination to create works that range in size from a few inches to several feet. The majority of my work is considered naturalistic impressionism.

In 2023, I started a plein air group for local artists to paint outdoors once a week during the summer months. Through this community of artists we provide feedback, support, and encouragement to one another. I would like to do the same on a monthly/bi-monthly basis with portrait drawing, particularly during the fall and winter months. When teaching portrait classes at MacRostie Art Center, I realized that we don't have opportunities to practice drawing from life, which is essential for becoming skilled portraitists. As a resident artist, I would provide portrait drawing opportunities (coordinating and paying models, communicating with artists, etc.) for people to practice drawing and painting portraits in a relaxed, low-cost environment. Artists would be able to offer feedback to one another and learn from each other while developing their portrait skills.

Resources:

- Natural light is preferred
- Internet
- Electrical outlets
- I have all other necessary equipment and materials.

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Artist, Instructor and Facilitator

Nelia Harper French is a multi-disciplinary artist trained in classical impressionism with an emphasis on landscape painting. Skilled in a variety of media, she shares and develops her abilities and knowledge through teaching youth and adults, creating and designing collaborative community art projects, and encouraging others in the creation of art for personal and public engagement.

Select Experience

- **Instructor**
Teaching the fundamentals of drawing and painting to youth and adults, and creating customized workshops to develop skills in perspective, observation, composition, portraiture and painting techniques.
- **Community Engagement with Area Artists**
Established *Itasca Plein Air* for artists in and around Grand Rapids, MN and Itasca County. Coordinates area artists to paint art en plein air from May-October, locating painting locations, promoting weekly paint-outs, working with artists to display artwork with local arts organizations.
- **Youth Summer Camps, Duluth, MN**
Developed a three-year summer art program for low-income children of diverse backgrounds who have been impacted by long-term homelessness in conjunction with Damiano Center and Steve O'Neil Apartments. Created and received grant funds to teach art to 30 youth. Trained staff and volunteers. Coordinated guest artists, community painting opportunities, and curated a culminating art show.
- **Multi-media Youth Mural, Duluth, MN**
Procured a grant funded project to create a large-scale, multi-media triptych with middle-school aged youth and the Duluth Art Institute with a local non-profit organization. Coordinated local public area reception with youth and community stakeholders.

Education

Great Lakes Academy of Fine Art, Jeffery T. Larson, Duluth, MN, 2019-2023
Deborah Paris, landscape painting mentorship, 2017-2019
Schissler Academy of Fine Art, Loveland, CO, 2013-2014
Front Range Community College, Fort Collins, CO 2012-2013 – Drawing and Figure Drawing
Masters in International & Intercultural Management Coursework
School for International Training, Brattleboro, VT, 2001
Bachelor of Arts in Women's Studies, and Social Change and Community Development in Africa
St. Catherine University, St. Paul, MN, 1998

SELECT EXHIBITIONS – Juried, Group and Solo Shows

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2024 Nature's Palette, Solo Show, Duluth Pottery and Tile, Duluth, MN
2024 Moment of Memory: Minnesota Landscapes Painted from Life, Bell Museum, St. Paul, MN
2024 Northern Landscapes, MacRostie Art Center, Grand Rapids, MN
2021-2023 Great Lakes Academy of Fine Art Student Show, Duluth, MN
2021-2024 Plein Air Grand Marais, Grand Marais, MN, Artist Choice Award 2022
2022 Duluth Art Institute Members Show, Duluth, MN
2021 Members Show, Outdoor Painters of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
2019 Dreaming in Color, Pastel Society of Colorado, Member Show, Grand Junction, CO
2019 Plein Air Artists of Colorado Members Show, Earth, Walsenburg, CO
2015-2018 Annual Chasing Light Invitational of Northern Colorado Plein Air Painters, Fort Collins, CO
2018 8th Annual Plein Air Salon, June/July, Plein Air Magazine
2017-2018 3rd Annual Expressions Art Show, Fort Collins, CO
2017-2018 Steamboat Plein Air Event, Steamboat Springs, CO
2016-2018 Annual Pastel Society of Colorado Mile High Exhibition, CO, Guerilla Painter Award 2017
2018 Creative Capitol Show – The Beauty of Colorado, Denver Capitol Building, Denver, CO
2016-2017 Annual National Lines Into Shapes, Estes Park, CO
2016 Solo Show, Peak to Prairie, Fort Collins, CO
2014 Solo Show, From Near and Far, Fort Collins, CO

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Outdoor Painters of Minnesota, Member 2021-Present
Pastel Society of Colorado, Member 2016-2022, Co-Treasurer 2021-2022
Plein Air Artists of Colorado, Member, 2015-2019

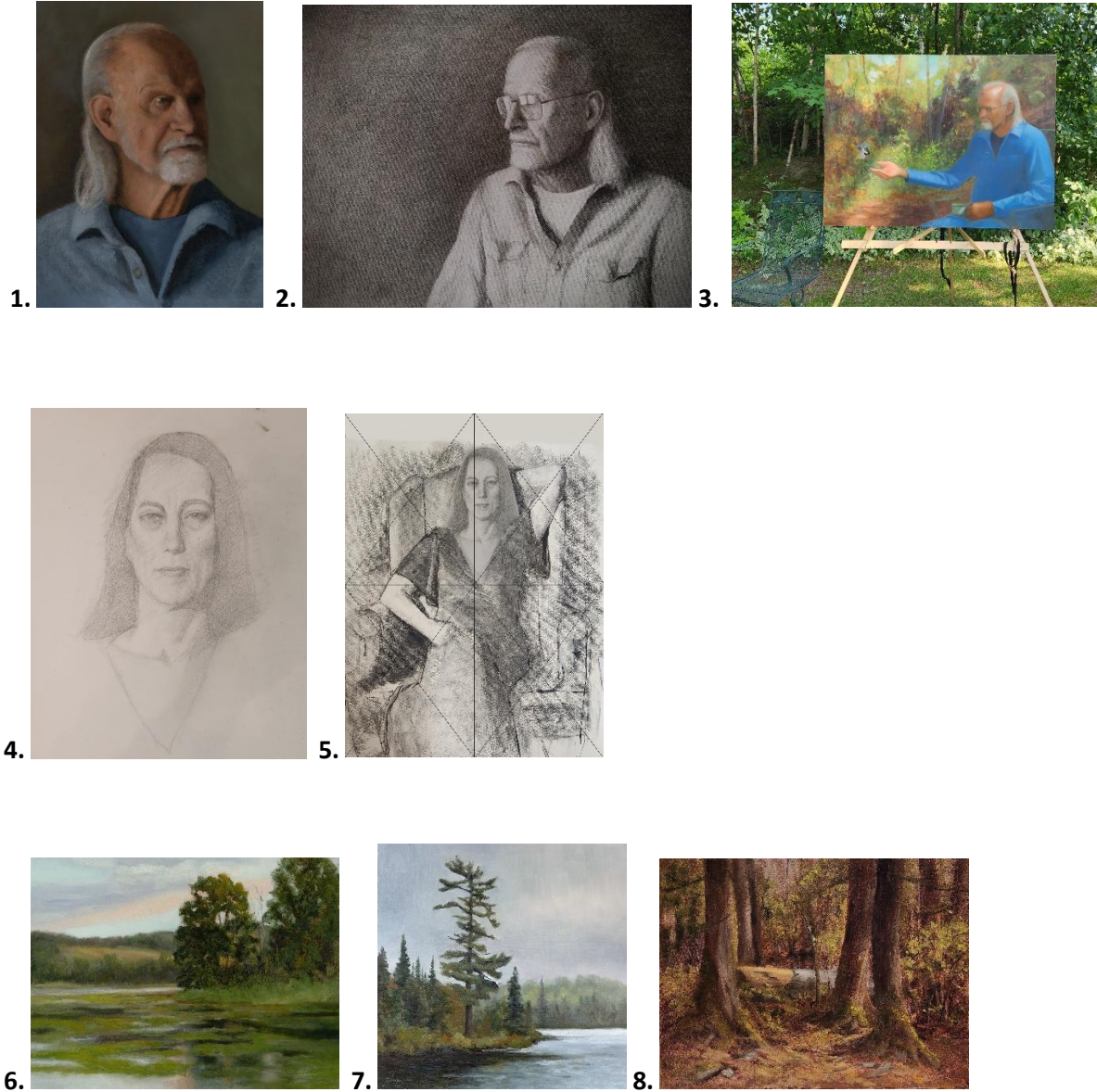
SELECT RESIDENCIES & GRANTS

Artist in Residency at Central School, MacRostie Art Center and City of Grand Rapids, MN 2023-2024
MN State Arts Board Recipient: Arts Learning Grant 2022, Creative Individuals Grant 2023, 2025
NEA-ARP Working Artist Project Grant 2022
Arrowhead Regional Arts Grant: Arts Learning Grant, 2020, 2021

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Work Sample Images



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Work Sample Description

Example 1: Portrait of Jim, 12x16, oil on panel, 2023

I met Jim while working as an artist-in-residence in the “Attic”. I completed several drawings of Jim and this color study.

Example 2: Charcoal Study of Jim, 18x24, 2024

While we waited for the temperature to warm up, I did a charcoal study of the pose of Jim I would use outdoors.

Example 3: Breakfast at the Hand Café – in progress, 36x48, oil on linen

I am currently in the process of completing this piece.

Examples 4: Study of Laurie, graphite, 9x12

As part of the design process and thinking about my idea for painting Laurie, I completed this drawing of her portrait for a reference.

Example 5: Concept for Laurie, mixed media, 30x40

Working with Laurie over several sessions, we came up with this design which I then transferred to a large canvas and am in the process of painting.

Example 6: Sunrise on Beaver Lake, 12x16, oil on panel, 2024

Painted on location for Prairie Lakes Plein Air.

Example 7: White Pine, 10x10, oil on linen, 2023

Painted on location for Plein Air Grand Marais.

Example 8: In the Land of Cedar and Pine, 8x10, oil on panel, 2024

Painted on location for Plein Air Grand Marais.

Example 9: Breaking Light on John’s Bog, 20x24, oil on linen, 2024

Painted in the studio from a plein air study.