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Today's
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Breakfast With Us



"Art is the window to man's soul. Without it, he would never be able to see beyond his immediate world; nor could the world see the man within."

— Lady Bird Johnson

But what of the artists who open this window? More often than not, they are women. Throughout history, frequently overcoming obstacles, women pursued the various disciplines that constitute the arts. Today, art continues to speak to our souls, whether through the written word, paint on a canvas, or a song from the heart. Charlotte is fortunate to have a host of accomplished female artists who inspire us every day. Here's a look at a few of those women and the forces that drive them.



Nellie Ashford Rawls Folk Artist

Nellie Ashford Rawls, a self-taught folk artist, calls upon items and stories from her childhood to produce creative collages, using everything from bright acrylics to an array of natural objects, and placing them on paper, canvas, and boards. Rawls' work is on display in several Charlotte galleries and can also be found across the country, as well as in Canada and Africa.

"Children inspire me to create because I paint a lot like them," Rawls says. "You can see the smiles on their faces when they finish their pieces."

If I could not craft, I would be ...

"Lost ... and probably really sad."

My work space:

"I don't have a studio right now, so I'm winging it and using my living room as my creative space, which makes it even more folk artsy! I have things from my parents' past here: tools, washbasins, smoothing irons. Those tangible memories are part of what makes me create the stories that I tell through my work."

I cannot work if I don't have ...

"Some type of a tool. It can be as simple as a spoon or an old brush."

What drives my creative spirit:

"My parents were born in the 1800s. Remembering them and their lives — and surrounding myself with objects from their time — drives me to tell the old-time stories the people of their day used to tell and talk about."



Elizabeth Bradford Painter

The beauty of the rural landscape takes center stage in much of Elizabeth Bradford's work. A native Carolinian, Bradford captures the nuances of nature in her paintings. Her current chosen medium is acrylic on canvas or wood panel, and she has recently begun painting scenes from her foreign travels. She has participated in the U.S. State Department's Art in Embassies Program, which places the works of American artists on display in U.S. embassy residences worldwide. Her paintings can also be found in corporate and private collections across America.

If I could not paint, I would be ...

"A sculptor."

My work space:

"My space is small — 'just the right bigness,' as my son used to say when he was very young. It's a modified tenant farmhouse on our old farmstead, and it's charming, but it's also covered with spilled paint and can be pretty messy. Most of the windows are aimed north, so the light is lovely."

I cannot work if I don't have ...

"Determination. My work habits aren't too often affected by external things. It's a matter of just gettin' up and doin' it. The struggle is mostly internal, I find."

What drives my creative spirit:

"My creativity is often stirred by adversity or lack. It responds well to the absence of the expected, and blooms when I have to devise a divergent path to beauty, art, good food, housing, clothing."



Claire Ritter Jazz Composer / Pianist / Educator

After firmly establishing herself as an accomplished jazz musician during her 16 years in Boston, Claire Ritter returned to Charlotte, the city of her roots, and to her alma mater, Queens University of Charlotte. Also a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music, Ritter has studied with a legion of jazz legends, and she currently composes, teaches, and performs around The Queen City. She founded and is artistic director of Composers Charlotte at Queens. She has received numerous composer grants and her work has been performed all over the world.

If I could not compose and perform, I would be ...

"An abstract painter; spending more time traveling to places that intrigue."

My work space:

"A performance/teaching space that's approximately 700 square feet, with large glass windows, a 24-foot ceiling, and two Kawai 6-foot grands. The artist loft overlooks ponds, trees, and a field of grazing Arabian horses."

I cannot work if I don't have ...

"Openness, solitude, and nature surrounding me."

What drives my creative spirit:

"Passion, imagination, and the muse. Being able to capture and express the essence of something in its raw authenticity creates purpose. Engaging students to discover their voices by painting music from the soul is another extraordinary experience that goes beyond the notes."



Dr. Lynn Fuller Violinist / Conductor

At the podium of Charlotte's first professional chamber orchestra is Dr. Lynn Fuller, founder and musical director of Queen City Virtuosi. Maestro Fuller is a professional violinist who studied at North Carolina School of the Arts, the University of South Carolina, and UNC Charlotte, earning a Doctor of Music Arts in Conducting degree. She has achieved international acclaim, appearing with the Tucumán Symphony Orchestra and the Rosario Symphony Orchestra in Argentina, and the China Opera and Dance Theatre Symphony Orchestra in Beijing.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. LYNN FULLER



If I could not conduct, I would be ...

"Working in the FBI or CIA, or as an interior decorator."

My work space:

"The room where I work has cocoa-colored walls, tall bookshelves, and a big, black-lacquered table that originally belonged to my grandmother. I often stretch out on the floor when I'm reading, writing down ideas, or studying music."

I cannot work if I don't have ...

"My materials — pencils, eraser, pencil sharpener, ruler, metronome — and, while I enjoy mild background or ambient sound, abrupt noises or interruptions distract me."

What drives my creative spirit:

"The desire to gain knowledge, my deep passion for music, and the challenge of presenting concerts that will be meaningful and memorable to the audience."



Lindy Dobbins
Singer / Songwriter

Lindy Dobbins first found herself in a professional recording studio at the age of 7. Though she's now only 29 years old, Dobbins has already found her niche as a professional singer and songwriter, and has garnered numerous awards, including Best Local Songwriter of 2007 and 2008 from *Creative Loafing*, and Best Female Vocalist finalist at the 2007 Charlotte Music Awards. She and her alternative rock band, the Red Velvet Manx, continue to play venues in and around Charlotte, entertaining with their distinct style and unique brand of music.

If I could not write and perform music, I would be ...

"Writing poetry and involved in theater."

My work space:

"My bandmates and I call the rehearsal room 'The Bat Cave,' but that's because we had to free a live bat from the space once during a jam session and the name just stuck after that. There isn't a fixed space for song writing; it's wherever inspiration strikes."

I cannot work if I don't have ...

"Support from the community. Venues don't care how good an artist is unless people are showing up to listen!"

What drives my creative spirit:

"The need for resolution, mainly. In her song *Witness*, Sarah McLachlan refers to songwriting as 'misery made beautiful,' and that's usually what drives my writing. I can let go of negative thoughts and feelings more easily if I can turn them into something beautiful."

PHOTO BY ASHLEY DENITT



Christina "Cigi" Guzman
Clothing Designer

At just 26 years old, Christina "Cigi" Guzman calls herself a professional daydreamer, although she actually does work — as a graphic designer and bartender — in addition to designing clothes!

She began her career as a clothing designer while she was in college, even outfitting Grammy-nominated artists. Today, her work is available online and at SouthEnd's NICHE boutique, where her fall collection will debut this month. During Charlotte Fashion Week, Guzman will showcase "The Flock," a hip clothing line she created to "reflect the beauty of the real, everyday human flock."

If I could not design clothes, I would be ...

"In a traveling band."

My work space:

"I live and work out of my tiny uptown apartment, so I am forced to be a minimalist. Labels and storage boxes have saved my life on more than one occasion, and I've learned that less is more."

I cannot work if I don't have ...

"Daily conversations with 'The Man Upstairs,' background noise, occasional pep talks from my ma, and, most importantly, joy."

PHOTO BY SARA RENEE PHOTOGRAPHY



What drives my creative spirit:

"Knowing that I have the power to inspire someone right now. What inspires me is The Human Flock. You. Me. Us. We."

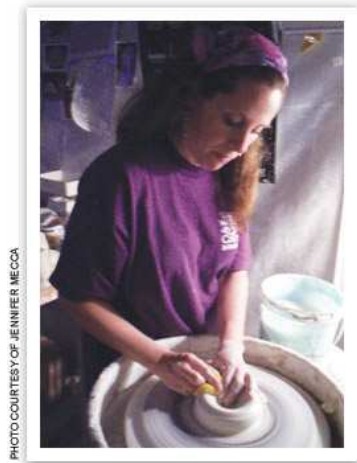


PHOTO COURTESY OF JENNIFER MECCA



Jennifer Mecca Potter

When she was a young girl, Jennifer Mecca watched closely as her family prepared elaborate meals, placing particular emphasis on the intricate tableware. Today, she's a full-time studio potter known for her extraordinary pots and serving-ware. Mecca, who considers herself a utilitarian potter, also teaches classes and workshops for everyone from children to college students and adults. She has studied pottery design and techniques around the world, and her work is on display in craft galleries along the East Coast.

If I could not design pots, I would be ...

"A jeweler. The first craft I was exposed to was jewelry, and I love handmade jewelry."

My work space:

"There is nothing fancy about my studio. It's off the back of the house in an old screened-in porch. In the wintertime we put up three layers of plastic and I use heaters for warmth. In the summertime, all the plastic comes down and I turn on the ceiling fan! My kiln is in a shed in our backyard. It's very basic, but it has worked for me."

I cannot work if I don't have ...

"Uninterrupted time from my family."

What drives my creative spirit:

"I think if you're a hands-on creative person, you just need to make stuff. Lately, pondering the traditions of my family and memories of the past are what have been inspiring me."



PHOTO BY PAUL MURPHY



Pat MacEnulty Writer

Pat MacEnulty is the author of several books, as well as numerous short stories, essays, poems, and plays. She has earned awards for her work and is in the process of adapting one of her books for film. Her latest novel, *Picara*, is scheduled for release in November and is inspired by 18th century novels, as well as the peace movement and her experiences growing up around musicians. A recipient of a Ph.D. from the Creative Writing Program at Florida State University, MacEnulty also works as a writing coach, editor, and teacher.

If I could not write, I would be ...

"Nothing. Writing is who I am."

My work space:

"Right now, it's a bedroom at the front of the house. When I'm working I can see what's going on in the cul-de-sac, which is nice. Sometimes I take my laptop downstairs and work on the front porch or in the living room. I often do my initial writing in a coffee shop."

I cannot work if I don't have ...

"Cookies."

What drives my creative spirit:

"It's just an urge that I've always had. I'm working on a memoir about taking care of my mother and my daughter, so they are my inspiration for that work." **TCW**

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