



Amy Eliason

Artist, Analyst and Teacher

BY PATRICK MARES

Amy Eliason is the first artist I've met with the mien of a motivational speaker, or C level executive. The way she organizes her work habits, analyzes her process and engages others as if it's the most natural thing in the world highlight the rather disorganized state of the artist stereotype. She's also a constant presence at the Art Garage in Green Bay, whether she's teaching, selling her art or just enjoying the work of others.

When I asked how she manages so much output, both in personal and professional work, Amy told us she has a fairly disciplined schedule for an artist.

"Every day I get up, have my coffee,"

Amy said "take my shower, take my dog Murphy for a walk, and come here to the Art Garage. Maybe one day a week I go out and do sales calls, try to stimulate more orders. And one day a week I teach. And I also have students that come to my studio for one on one lessons."

The studio she says, was an old boat-house. She invested \$11,000 to rebuild it into a four seasons workshop, swapping in windows and an air conditioner, and covering old concrete floors.

She runs her art business on three sources of revenue. Special orders make up much of her work, and teaching supports her personal projects.

"Right now I have several classes at the Art Garage," she said "and I have some

one-day painting workshops coming up at Richeson Gallery in Kimberly, Wisconsin. So if you are a busy busy person and you still want to paint you can sign up for a one day workshop rather than classes every day."

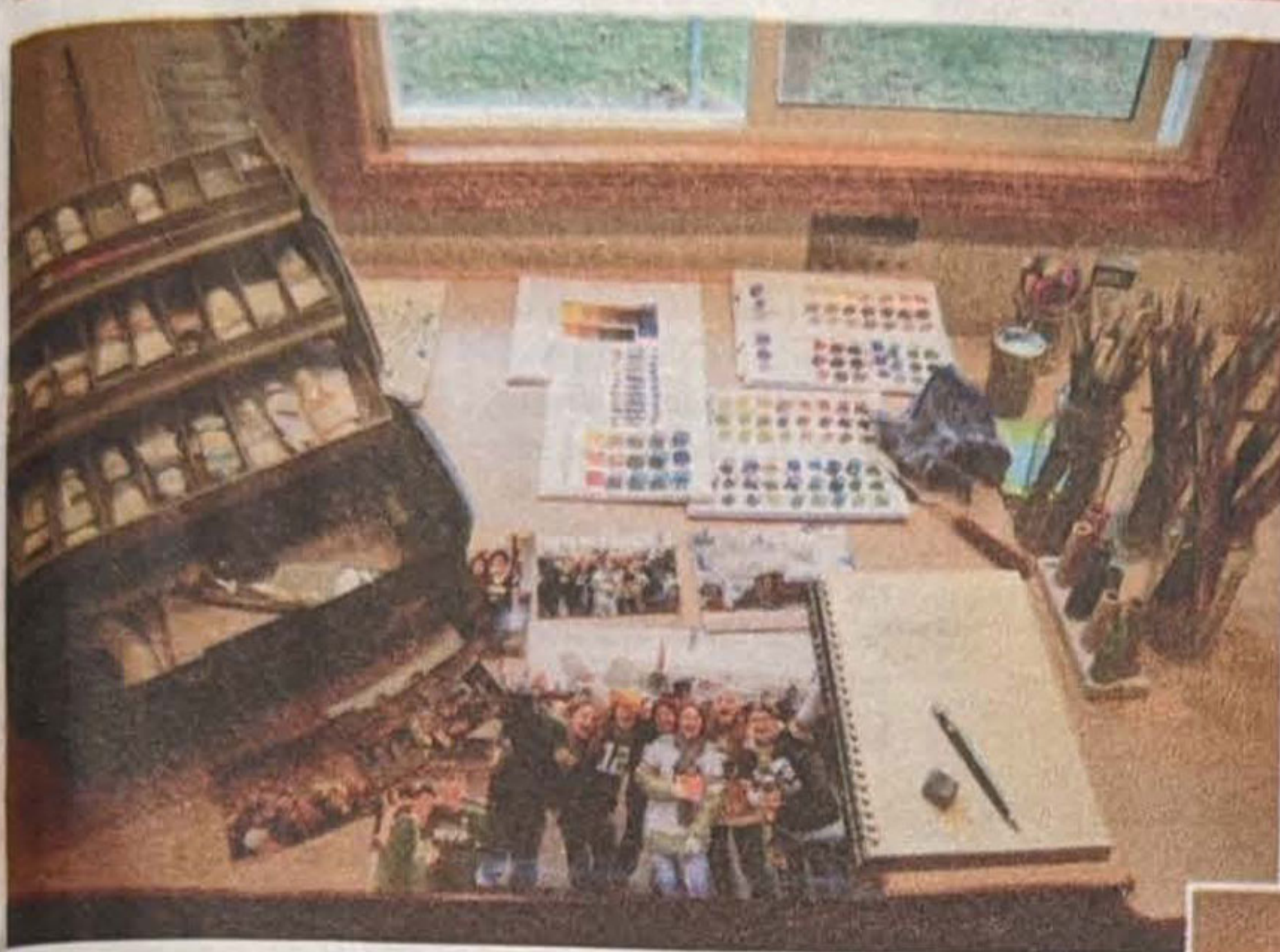
Ms. Eliason has been working with Art Garage from the first.

"I believe Sandy, who started it," Amy said "came to my art club meeting, Arts Unlimited and started talking about her idea to open up an art gallery in the old cannery. And I jumped on board because it was such a great opportunity. Over the years I've seen it grow and blossom, and it's wonderful. I teach painting and drawing to adults and children, workshops...I also teach the cork and canvass events. The

class in October, we are painting a pelican in the water, the whole group will paint the same thing and I'll lead them step by step. I also rent a gallery wall space every month. I hold painting demonstrations for gallery night, and host 'meet the artist' night regularly. And once a year or so I rent the front gallery, and do a sole exhibit and invite my friends and my past art prospects too at the wine and hors d'oeuvres event."

She breaks her own art down into two main categories, studio pieces and on-site work. On site she has to contend with changing light and a lack of the compositional sketches she uses to frame her work before she puts a brush to canvas.

"These are simpler looser paintings because they are done on site," she said



Amy typically works at this desk. Shown here are the photos she used for reference on the packer fan painting. To the right is her sketchbook, with ideas for the final portrait, and to the left are her paints.

"you've got to paint quickly because the sun and shadows keep changing. All the rest of mine are studio pieces where I spend a great deal of time."

Amy said a studio piece begins with, 'an adventure.'

"That's step one. I grab my sketchbook, and my pencil and camera, and I go out and do something fun."

Recently Amy had been at the Whet Whistle Wine festival, but inspiration could be anything.

"It can be sitting in my backyard watching the songbirds," she said. "My flying to Montana and spending a week at a ranch. It can be going to Washington Island and exploring the harbor there and meeting some folks. But all of my paintings start with an adventure. I take reference photos, sketches and take notes, and color studies."

For smaller pieces in-studio she usually works at her desk, but when necessary she has a floor easel.

"The next step is composition. Once I have the compositional sketch worked out, I'm like 'Okay. How big should this be? Do I want the bird on the top left,

or the lower right? Where do I want the subject? I'll draw out anything that needs to be proportionate or perspective. If it's nature, you know, flowers, trees, grass, I don't need to sketch that out first. I just start painting. And typically by the time I pick up my paintbrush I can already see the painting completed in my mind because of the preliminary work. I'm detail oriented, I'm analytical, I'm real organized, and I like to work out all of the bugs before I begin



painting. That's when I turn on my music, and relax and just start painting."

In one corner she has a collection of studio paintings featuring the birds she sees

out the window at her desk.

"There are many who consider themselves a birder," she said "I'm one. I put bird feeders right outside my drafting table where I work, with bird seed and suet to attract all types of birds. When I put this window in here, I made sure there was no screen. Because I can shoot photos, close-ups with my zoom lens right through the window. And I use those for my sketches and paintings."

She chooses her materials based on the task at hand.

"I use oils for humans,"

fun painting."

She showed me a piece only partially completed, it's seven feet by two feet.

"I have hundreds of photos of people on the beach and kids digging in the sand," she said "I'm going to put them all on one big canvas. When you walk up to this painting you're going to feel like you are just stepping on to the beach. It has the sailboat, a big umbrella with the lady sitting under it, these are my kids when they were little, they're all going to that beach too."

Before I left Amy pulled out a canvas full of cheering Packer fans at a tailgate. It was a piece she'd arranged like many, picking and choosing elements from a number of photos.



Amy said "because you want to get the wet blending. Wet on wet you get better flesh tones for paintings of people. When you're using the wet paints you're using a palette."

While she's comfortable painting almost anything up to and including an aircraft carrier, some of her favorite subjects seem to be people and their pets.

She pointed to a painting of her daughter, holding a pet, mimicking Renoir's Luncheon of the Boating party.

"We had just gone to the antique shop and bought some flowers," she said. "You can see the chairs from here. And we reinvented this with her in costume just for a

"When you walk around with a camera at tailgating parties everyone tries to photobomb," Amy said "but I'll confide to you that I was doing a bit of photobombing myself amidst the cheerful crowd. I wanted to be in it, so I put me in it here."

Amy then pulled out her paints and mixed the colors, wanting to show me how she worked. But before she put the paint down she asked one thing that cemented her as not just a doer of art, but also a giver. She asked me to take her place, to muddle the work of a professional so she could take a picture of me in the same spot in front of the easel.

It had been some time since I last took the time to pick up a paintbrush, but... **S**