

COMMUNITY

# Art Mimics Nature



BY LEANNE DANIELSEN, EVENTS MANAGER

## MEET AMY BARTLETT WRIGHT, A RHODE ISLAND ARTIST WHO SPECIALIZES IN BRINGING NATURE MURALS TO LIFE

When art and nature lovers think of paintings that portray the environment in a very engaging way, they likely think of Rhode Island artist Amy Bartlett Wright. If they don't presently, they certainly will when they visit Save The Bay's Hamilton Family Aquarium in Newport this winter. There they will find three murals that represent specific Bay-related habitats: rocky shore, freshwater wetland and sandy shore.



Amy has worked for 35 years as a professional artist, muralist and natural science illustrator. She specializes in portraying animals in their environments in a way that creates a sense of space and dimension.

These murals are part of a long-standing relationship the artist has with Save The Bay. Amy created the "Our Living Bay" mural at The Bay Center in Providence in 2005, a facility that is used regularly for education programs.

"I want my art to hold people," she says. "I was thrilled Save The Bay had the confidence in me to tackle this."

Amy practices plein-air painting, which means that she paints an outdoor scene by standing in front of it with her canvas and easel. Painting from life leads to more expressive painting, guiding the artist for future studio work and resulting in a piece that convincingly combines realism and expression.

When I visited Amy in her studio this summer, she was in the process of working on the 27-by-5-foot freshwater wetland mural filled with wildlife based on studies she'd completed in the past. The animals in each scene come from painting and drawing those same species previously; some from life, others from taxidermied models.

"This is with the intention of making the animals fit into the landscape swimming, walking or flying or just above the water surface."

Through a series of smaller renderings, the winning designs became the working models.

Embarking on the task of creating three large murals in March 2022 had its challenges, but Amy wasn't daunted. In fact, she has tackled much larger murals, including a 30,000-square-foot mural in Boston.

"Size is not always what determines the challenge. It's often the parameters."

In addition to size, the parameters include content, design and compatibility with fabrication and multiple wall surfaces. In the case of the murals at Save The Bay's Hamilton Family Aquarium, the paintings are on canvas, which is then either affixed to the



Amy Bartlett Wright (top) captures the beauty of the Bay's wildlife and habitats in a series of murals (above and opposite page) destined for Save The Bay's Hamilton Family Aquarium, opening this winter.



wall or inserted into a plastic sleeve, depending on the location.

"The science and parameters of each project have to be met, but it's the art that is the magic touch you can't define. The challenge was thrilling," she says.

"[The aquarium] is a state-of-the-art venue. It has to feel like the place and teach the viewer about Narragansett Bay." Amy emphasizes how much Save The Bay has done to address important issues. "This is one way I can do more and I am just grateful. We want to relay the love and caring we have for the land and the water that has to go on after us." ■



Creating truly immersive wildlife murals involves a multi-step process that, for Amy, involves marking out the mural placement (left) and even building 3D models (above).

