

## Nancy B. Baker



A visit to the Nancy Baker's home oasis in Greenfield provides a feast for the eyes. It is clear that Nancy is expert with many techniques and materials, including silk painting, printmaking, ceramic sculpture, faux painting, trompe l'oeil, pieced quilting, embroidery, and more. An aroma of deliciousness in the air hinted that she might also be a skillful cook as well.

This paradise of color begins at the tiled garage entrance on one side of the house and on the other side, a garden path leads to a backyard with a bubbling fountain and Mexican pottery and birdhouses decorating the wall of a shed. "I love things to be bright and cheery and fun and whatever I can do to make it that way, I do!" says Nancy.

As a muralist, Nancy helps transform other places across the country with her lively designs. While in Arizona this past winter, she worked on two murals, finishing the final panel of three in a private home, and decorating an arched doorway for a small business called *The Bird House*. Avid birders, Nancy and her husband have criss-crossed the country and world to admire and study them. Her June show at the Co-op, titled *The Nature of Things*, has fifteen new paintings that combine her interest and affection for avifauna with the tactile and colorfully creative method of working she has



become known for.

“The more you learn about birds, the more fascinating they are. Seeing new ones is pretty exciting, but seeing the same ones return year after year is also very rewarding,” noted Nancy, who is a member of the Hampshire Bird Club and participates in a variety of studies conducted by UMass and the Smithsonian that track changes in the bird population.

Her paintings for this show incorporate collage and abstract backgrounds, with detailed renderings of the subject. As an artist working in many mediums, it isn’t surprising that she should find novel ways to combine them. The watercolors were done in Arizona, and show some of the birds she noticed while there, such as a Long-eared Owl.



She cuts Japanese origami paper to collage foliage, branches, and sometimes parts of the birds themselves, adding texture and areas of pattern to contrast with the surface of the paper. “I like the contrast, having the really tight stuff as a starting point, and a background that’s more abstract,” Nancy commented. “Also, I think it’s like writing. You hear writers talk about novels, how they don’t necessarily have an outline to begin, but take it where the

characters develop. That's kind of like my painting, I'll have an idea in my head and then it evolves until it has become something else."

Larger acrylics on canvas were completed once she was back home. She used marbled papers from Chena River Marblers in these, which she got at their annual open house sale. She even dipped a few papers herself while there and the possibility of wandering into yet another medium beckons. But, it's been a busy time for Nancy getting all the work completed that she wanted to for this show, because she also includes new painted silk jackets and scarves, some painted canvas floor cloths, and fabric appliqué wall hangings. The spacious gardens outside her window have been waiting patiently while she completes these many pieces of art.

Silk painting was something she started doing after taking a class at the Guild Art Center in Northampton. She had admired garments created of painted silk at the Skera boutique, and before long was producing enough to start thinking of marketing them. Along came a call for consignors from the newly formed Shelburne Arts Cooperative; she was immediately juried in and has remained



with the group ever since--roughly sixteen years now!

Being part of a supportive creative community has been a boon to her art. Explains Nancy, "I do keep going off on tangents! Maybe I should stick with something to get better at it, but I get bored. Something I see, something someone else has done that I think I could use in a different way, looking at new things other members are doing—it all inspires me. I think I get my best ideas working with other people." Nancy happily takes commissions. More of her work can be seen at [www.artscoop.com](http://www.artscoop.com).