



# Art Therapy

A Northern California artist finds beauty and solace in painting the natural world.

WRITTEN BY DEBORAH BISHOP  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALANNA HALE



**I**n many ways, Laine Justice is her own ideal audience. “I’m not drawn to art you can take in at a glance,” she confides, surrounded by works in progress at her studio in Cloverdale. “I’m excited by paintings you can look at for a very long time and still not see everything.” Justice’s oils and watercolors thrum with life. As one looks, things begin to emerge from the collage-like layers of densely applied pigment—which may also be adorned with gold leaf, scraps of fabric and glass beads. Suddenly, a beak becomes visible, then a bear’s ear, a fox’s face and maybe the outline of a deer. “It’s a bit like *Where’s Waldo?*” the artist says, smiling at the comparison.

Nature is a source of inspiration and respite for Justice, whose path to becoming an artist was filled with twists and turns worthy of a Grimm’s fairy tale. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, and raised in Portland, Oregon, Justice was sent to a restrictive CEDU boarding school in Idaho where she was not allowed to spend much time sketching. When she emerged three years later, Justice pursued art with a vengeance. She studied life drawing at the Pacific Northwest College of Art before earning a BFA from the Pratt Institute, where she focused on sculpture and painting and nurtured her love of raw pigments at a program in Lucca, Italy.

A material polymath, Justice works on several projects concurrently: oils on canvas, watercolors, papier-mâché sculptures, mulberry paper scrolls and a hand-bound, oversized children’s book that has been years in the making. The tome illustrates the fanciful plot of *Little Big Ears* and is illustrated with watercolor, ink, dye, gouache, acrylic, graphite and gold leaf. Like a mash-up of Henry Darger and Richard Scarry (his playful, scene-stuffed illustrations were among Justice’s childhood favorites), the densely drawn pages also reflect her affinity for intricate Persian miniatures. “As with everything I do, the hardest part is knowing when to stop,” says Justice, whose work is represented at Gallery Lulo in Healdsburg and Fouladi Projects in San Francisco.

When she finds herself stuck, Justice returns to her first love, life drawing, which acts like a palate cleanser on her psyche. “Observing nature teaches me to just look, see and draw, without any attachment,” she says. “This got me through some tough times as a girl, and now that I’m older, it brings me pure joy.” ■



Artist Laine Justice poses in front of two works: The large painting is titled *Running Still* and the smaller one is *Kitten Clouds* (previous page, left). In her studio (opposite), tools include chalk and pastels (left) and oil paints (below). She works surrounded by watercolors and drawings—small studies that may become larger pieces (bottom).

