

Memphis Artist Paints Cats in All Their Colors

Meet cat lover and talented artist Angi Cooper. Her paintings reflect historical feline subjects, though her own pets often stand in as models.

Susan Agee

Posted: Tue Jun 28 00:00:00 PDT 2005

Angi Cooper has always lived around cats. The first one's name was "Cat" pretty unoriginal considering the names of the subsequent felines that crossed Cooper's path.

"I don't remember her, but she's there in pictures from when I was a baby." Cooper says. She does remember the next cat, Hester, named by Cooper's mother because of the red stripe that looked like the letter "A" on the cat's forehead. That poetic naming set a pattern for Cooper's life in many ways. There were more cats and poetry, sometimes a combination of the two, often written on a canvas in vibrant color.

Her Own Path

Cooper earned a graphic design degree from the University of Memphis in 1990, but she never used it to climb the corporate ladder. Instead, Cooper combined her love of art, travel and animals, making a name and a path for herself in the art world.

Cooper's cat paintings are distinctive in their style and colors, and in her choice of subjects, including famous cats of the near and distant past. Mrs. Chippy was the carpenter's mate aboard the ill-fated Antarctic voyage of the ship *The Endurance* in 1914, and is also the subject of Cooper's painting of the same name. "Mrs. Chippy" is a mixed-media portrait, combining a nautical map and pictures of carpentry tools on vellum paper.

A more recent feline icon is Scarlett, the mother cat who saved her five kittens from a burning building in Brooklyn in 1996. In her painting titled "Scarlett is a Heroine," Cooper rendered the scene of the rescue in a purposely childlike manner because of the heroic and dream-like quality of the tale. "I still cry when I read that story," Cooper says.

Down-Home Inspiration

Some of Cooper's cat paintings reflect her southern heritage and the musical legacy of her hometown of Memphis, Tenn. The "Cool Cats" series portrays comical cats as blues musicians playing various instruments.

The daily habits of cats are reflected in Cooper's work, too. In "Hello," a bathing cat stops mid-lick to acknowledge the onlooker's presence.

"When you walk in on them like that, it's like they're saying, 'yes? can I help you with something?'" Cooper says. "Freak" portrays a kitty in an even more vulnerable bathing position, or one, as Cooper says, similar to that of a "yoga master."