

The Life of an Artist

In our September issue of CAT FANCY, we featured Kayomi Harai as our Purrsonalities figure. CatChannel caught up with Harai again for an exclusive interview to ask how her career blossomed and what her advice is for other aspiring artists.

Elisa Jordan

Kayomi Harai is one of the lucky ones. The Japanese-born artist has made a career of her great loves art and cats.

Her fondness for the two began in childhood. An Osaka native, Harai's fascination for the feline variety began when she was just 2 or 3 years old. She and cats, she says, just clicked.

My parents always had a cat or two, she says. And I just loved them.

As her love for cats and animals grew, so too did her art talent. A self-taught artist, Harai began teaching herself to draw at around 3 years of age. In my spare time, I was always drawing and I was experimenting with many different media, she says. The precocious youngster kept at it, and at around 7 or 8 began working with paints. Through trial and error, she patiently tried different techniques to improve her art. I just kept trying, she says, until I was happy with the results. Harai's persistence paid off. She perfected her craft and developed a trademark: Kayomi Harai's cats have beautiful, expressive eyes. The eyes are so important to each painting that she begins each one with this particular feature. As an adult, the talented artist started her painting career by doing pet portraits. She also scored a job with a Japanese art company. It wasn't until moving to California, however, that her career truly blossomed. Harai's depictions of cats and wildlife took off, and galleries began showing her paintings. When Applejack, a company that licenses artwork, picked up Harai's work, her kitties began appearing on T-shirts, collector plates and greeting cards. Her career continues to expand. She hosts her own website, <http://members.aol.com/artycat/>, where art fans can inquire about original work or a print (usually around \$19), and she is also expanding back to where it all started Japan. A large Japanese toy company is working with Harai on turning some of her pictures into jigsaw puzzles. The same motivation that drove her to teach herself how to paint still exists. And it's that kind of motivation that she recommends to other aspiring artists. Never give up, she says. Keep on painting what you want to paint and enjoy every minute of it. There might be a lot of disappointments on the way I've experienced a lot but if you are passionate enough, you can always overcome them.

Freelance writer and editor Elisa Jordan lives in Long Beach, Calif., with her husband and two cats, Spencer and Roscoe.