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A Studio Visit with Artist, Dudley Zopp by Carla Rae Johnson

Dudley Zopp is a visual artist who lives and works on the coast of Maine. I met Dudley through the artist collective, “Spliced Connector,” and I visited her studio in August. I want to share Dudley’s work and process with readers of “The Artistic License” because her creative quest combines amazing aesthetic vision with a passionate concern for the natural world and its plant and animal inhabitants. Here are the questions I posed to Dudley and her answers.

1. Describe your creative practice: your preferred media and methods.

I work in a variety of media, principally oil and watercolor, but my first love is drawing, so I also use charcoal and pencil to explore ideas for the paintings, prints, and artist’s books I produce. Painting is an intuitive process of feeling my way into a subject without a fixed plan or methodology, pulling information from my gut, going from one question to the next in search of a solution. Books begin with an idea in search of a form, that then must be executed according to an A-B-C logic that is especially demanding in terms of craftsmanship. The process of relief printmaking falls somewhere in between. I enjoy both ways of working, and I have many projects in the pipeline at any given time, but I focus on them cyclically, not concurrently.

2. You have a beautiful, light-filled, spacious studio which you designed for yourself and your work. Share with our readers the logic of your studio and how it reflects your practice.

My thinking in designing the house/studio here in Lincolnville was that I wanted a small house and a large studio. The two are connected in the way that a New England barn is connected to the house. Within the studio, sliding doors give me year-round access to the outside world, which becomes even more important visually in winter. Daylight fluorescent lighting and a high ceiling provide an ideal working environment regardless of the time of day or weather conditions. The interior space of about 1000 square feet is divided into a presentation/sitting area, working areas, and a storage space with bins and flat files. Almost all the working tables are on casters so I can rearrange things as necessary, with an orientation to the painting walls. Off the main studio I have a small office that keeps the administrative work in a separate headspace from the creative work. Books are everywhere.

3. In addition to your impressive creative studio work you also invest countless hours in the natural environment restoring and maintaining habitat for native plants and wildlife. Please describe your passion and commitment to this work and how it relates to and informs your studio practice.

I have loved and interacted with the natural world, and I have been making art, since I was a small child. My move to Maine, first to Belfast (1994), and then to Lincolnville (2007), strengthened the connection between nature and art, in such a way that increasingly the two have become one. It has been a wonder to me how much the natural world provides, without my doing much of anything, but left to its own devices this place would revert to woodland with many invasive species. So roughly half my time during the year, I am outside working to maintain a variety of habitats and remove invasive plants including multiflora rose and purple loosestrife. This is seasonal work, and allows for an equal amount of time in the studio making work that responds to the processes and forms of the natural world. My passion and commitment are to the restoration of my 4.5 acres to a healthy environment for all life forms; the studio work is in some ways a by-product of that, as I seek to understand the hidden language that underlies our existence here. To better articulate this, I have just recently begun to outline a five-year project that will document both the habitat restoration and my art practice as equal partners in a whole trans-disciplinary practice.

