

Interview with Ann Ranlett MSA as ISSA's new MSA member

Can you tell us a little of your background in art and scratchboard? How long have you been doing this medium?

Aside from the occasional scratchboard on the school-grade paper surface along the way, I've been working in scratchboard since 1999. That's when I took a workshop with Trudy Nicholson at an illustrator's conference. She was using quality white scratchboard (EssDee brand). I learned then that scratchboard is actually quite forgiving, if you have a good board. It truly was a "light bulb moment"! I had worked in pen & ink for many years, but discovering a surface that I could work & re-work was fantastic. I mostly used the white EssDee surface until a year or two prior to the formation of ISSA, when I found the WetCanvas scratchboard forum. As I immersed myself in that forum and all the wonderful art & advice, I learned that most of the artists there were using the Ampersand Scratchboard (black), so I began using that surface more often. I will use Ampersand Clayboard (white) on occasion though, if the subject calls for it. As for art in general, I've been drawing since I could hold a crayon (50+ years). Art became a full-time job about 14 years ago. In addition to scratchboard, I've worked in graphite & color pencil, pen & ink, watercolor and mixed media (ink, watercolor, color pencil), but in the last couple of years, I've shifted to almost exclusively working in scratchboard. The bulk of my work is pet portraits, but I do work on other projects a few times each year.

One of the common questions we get asked is how did you know when you are ready to submit for SSA or MSA. Do you have any advice to help people know when they are ready?

I applied for SSA at the first opportunity after the formation of ISSA, and was thrilled to be accepted. Having spent a lot of time on the WetCanvas forum prior to the formation of ISSA (we did not have the Facebook groups at that time), I knew what the top level scratchboard artists were doing, and I felt confident that my work was of SSA quality. Getting to MSA took longer for me, of course, and is a great honor. I've looked up to our MSAs from day one, the skill and dedication they possess is phenomenal. We have a few artists in the organization who are not yet MSAs, whose work, in my opinion, is Master level quality, but there's more to it than that. Beyond the skilled hand, it's a process to build up the additional qualifications. I appreciate that component, taking the time to build a resume shows that one is truly dedicated to scratchboard.

With the work shared on WetCanvas, the Facebook groups, and our ISSA web site, all levels of scratchboard art is readily available for analysis and comparison. I suggest that anyone interested in applying for SSA or MSA really do some research and look at what the current SSA and MSA artists are creating. Of course, we also have the mentoring program, which is very helpful for anyone looking to apply for higher levels.

Did you find the feedback forms from the jurors helpful this year?

I did, very much so. Each juror has an opinion, of course, but whether one agrees completely or not, all the feedback should be considered.

Do you feel that if you are not accepted on your first try that it is worth trying again in the future under different jurors?

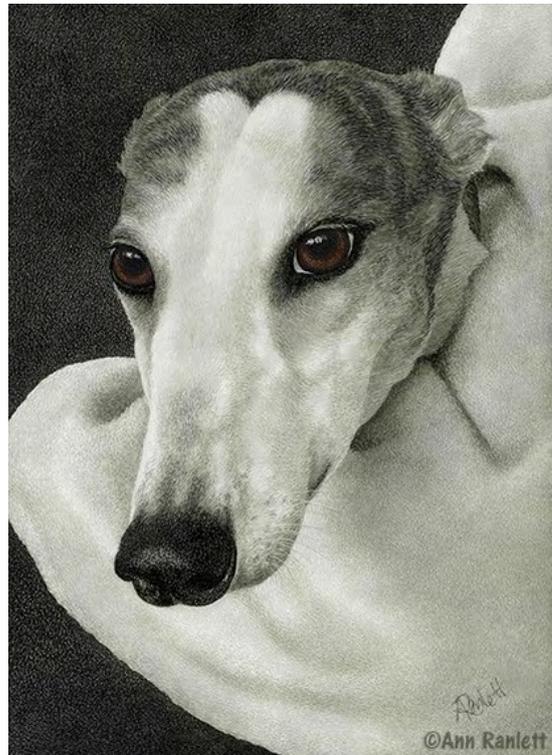
Absolutely! As I said above, each juror has an opinion. That's based on their unique knowledge and experience, which will vary from juror to juror. This was my THIRD try. My first try, I was over-confident and was rightfully not accepted. I gave it a rest, and with the second try in 2015, I really felt that I had the skill and qualifications, but 2 of the 3 jurors did not. My final try, I'll be honest, I barely squeaked through - one juror gave very high marks, the other two were more conservative - but it was

enough and I am very grateful. Now, if my two highest scoring judges had been on the same panel, I would have sailed through. Of course, that wasn't possible, since we select different jurors each year, but I point this out to show that it is the luck of the draw to some degree.

Why do you feel that members should strive to become an MSA or SSA in ISSA?

ISSA is still young and we're building our membership. As we grow, we will become better known, a larger portion of the public (and even other artists!) will understand that scratchboard is truly a fine art and our members are incredibly dedicated. We are not an elitist organization, and with the incredible level of support of each other and sharing amongst our members, I don't see that happening, but we do have a responsibility to inform the public of how impressive scratchboard can be. Having more members at the SSA and MSA levels proves that level of skill and dedication to the public. Having said that, applying for SSA or MSA is a personal decision, and also a financial one. Some members may be satisfied not ever applying, and we appreciate their support as members at any level - that certainly helps ISSA to grow and spread the word about scratchboard. For me, it was the recognition and validation of my abilities and efforts to promote this medium that I love so much. It's also something that my clients and collectors can appreciate, and allows me to raise my prices as a result of the status. As a professional artist, these things are important.

Ann Ranlett MSA
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We all welcome Ann to the elite group of Masters. "Safety", 7" x 5" Claybord was the winner of the **Silver Award in the Masters Division of the 2017 ISSA 6th Annual Exhibition in South Australia (and sold!)**