

## profile



PHOTO BY TRANG BASEHEART

“I AM NOT  
RETIRED  
by any means.”

— Pat Banks

# ARTIST making the world BRIGHTER ONESTROKE at a time

By Jamie Lober

Pat Banks is proud to call Kentucky home. “I do not know if I have ever been any place greener than Kentucky,” she said. Banks, 54, balances her duties as a professional artist and a children’s book illustrator.

“I would say my watercolor style is impressionistic realism,” Banks said. “I start out real loose, lots of water, and then add layers of details that tighten it up.” Nature is a recurrent theme in her artwork; she loves landscapes and waterscapes.

Banks is also a founder of a Richmond nonprofit art gallery, a member of the Arts Kentucky board and the director of the Kentucky Riverkeeper — an organization dedicated to increasing public awareness of the importance of a healthy Kentucky River and its tributaries.

“Almost 400 miles of river go through Lexington and almost a million people use it for their water source,” Banks said. “People have forgotten they own the water. The Ohio and Kentucky River do not belong to the water or power companies. You have to change people’s attitudes and win their hearts and minds.”

The first step is recognizing the issues, like recycling and pollution control, and know that they matter.

“We need to be aware of what is going on in our communities,” she said. “We need to have better water stewardship so we have something to pass down to our children.”

Art has been one means of advocacy for Banks. She is the proud recipient of a grant from the Kentucky Foundation for Women for a project called “Shape by Water.”

“I am going to develop a body of artwork with other artists that will travel and hopefully awaken people about water and environmental issues. This project is going to be looking at some of the beauty and some of the destruction,” Banks said.

It will allow her to blend environmental endeavors with her artistic work. But regardless of the project, Banks is confident her art will continue to evolve.

“You are always learning, working and looking for new experiences and ideas,” she said. “My advice to artists is to always challenge yourself and your skill level and go out of your comfort zone a little bit.” Her father helped to spark this special interest.

“My father was an architect so I grew up watching him

work,” Banks said.

During her long career, Banks has had the opportunity to be a visiting artist in other parts of the United States as well as Japan, Ecuador and France. She also lived in Canada for a time while her husband, Alan, was in graduate school. He now teaches at Eastern Kentucky University and is the director of the Center for Appalachian Studies.

But she is always anxious to return home because she has so much she looks forward to involving herself in, such as standing up for arts education, which is presently severely under-funded.

“Art and environment are sort of an endangered species,” Banks said. “I think you have to care about more than yourself. You need to love what you do and put your energy into that kind of productive activity.”

Banks has certainly followed her own advice, but knows it takes the efforts of many to make a difference.

“If we all do a little bit it will add up, so we have to think of others and lose ourselves a little,” she said.

In her free time, Banks enjoys gardening, kayaking, canoeing and hiking, all of which are incorporated into her art.

“I am not retired by any means,” she said. ■