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ART **WILLIAM HEIDERSOHN** June 14, 2006

Lay's colorful world comes to Lynn

BISEXUAL NORTH SHORE-BASED ARTIST HILARY EMERSON LAY PAINTS FROM REAL AND IMAGINED LIFE, WITH NEW SHOW IN LYNN, MASS. THROUGH AUG. 31

The last time the North Shore-based Hilary Emerson Lay agreed to an interview before an art show, she spent, at most, three minutes on the phone and was appalled to see that her paintings - many of which are of brightly colored animals - were described as emerging from her dreams.

"It kind of made me sound like I was crazy," said Lay during her second interview. Ever. As in, during the more than 10 years she has been painting professionally she has prized her privacy. "As long as you don't describe them as coming from my imagination, we'll be fine."

This is Lay, Sunday afternoon, white wine in hand. She had spent the day painting with a friend, had just driven in from a mini-vacation in Northampton.

The bisexual Lay, who came out first as a lesbian before a particularly messy break-up convinced her to give guys another try, doesn't see much of herself in her work. They're mostly of animals, fantastical representations of cats and dogs and sheep, but that only tells part of the story.

The other part lies in the cityscapes she creates from newsprint, words she doesn't even read when she's cutting them out of the newspaper and affixing them to their canvas backings.

"I tend to avoid using the sports pages and the obituaries," said Lay, who postpones reading the articles she uses in her work (if at all) until the painting is finished. "But then later certain words will pop out at me, and it's nothing I intended. They're all haphazard."

And, in fact, much the same can be said about how she got to where she's at. A childhood on Cape Cod in Brewster turned into an undergraduate degree in writing earned at Emerson College - while simultaneously studying children's book illustration.

She spent six months in England before moving into a girlfriend's Salem apartment, which resulted in her moving into her own place when that relationship went south, which led her to The Spirit of '76 Bookstore in Marblehead, where she's worked at going on four years.

In Marblehead, she has shown her work at local art shows in restaurants and churches, and it was through a bookstore employee that first brought her to the attention of the owners of the Lynn-based Gulu-Gulu Cafe.

It was fortuitous, this meeting, as Lay had recently returned from a one month painting sabbatical in California, at the request of her great aunt's longterm partner.

"She offered to pay me one month's salary, and let me have the time to work on my painting," said Lay.

Returning from California with her series of 18 paintings in-hand, she had her show and has spent the past few months completing pet portrait commissions resulting from a Marblehead show last year.

She paints mostly from memory, and yes, there is a bit of imagination involved - hence the confusion that resulted from the last interview she gave. But the animals are more than mere mental occupation. They are a reminder that even in adulthood, one can find an innocence, that one can return to the worlds and dreamscapes of childhood. •

There will be an opening night reception for Hilary Emerson Lay, photographer Nike Nikitina, and fellow mixed-media artist Emily Driscoll, June 15, from 7 to 9 p.m. at Gulu-Gulu Caf--eacute--, 56 Central Square, Lynn. The show runs through August 31. For more information about Lay connect to www.hilaryemersonlay.com.



Hilary Emerson Lay: represents landscapes, animals and cityscapes in her work.

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