

Diana Cercone: Profile

Illia Barger specializes in creativity

Most artists follow a different drummer. Area artist Illia Barger follows several.

Sometimes a drummer leads her to painting large, expressive flowers, fruits and vegetables that envelop us in their worlds. Others lead her to create captivating murals that move and motivate us or to design eco-friendly art clothing that's fun to wear and expresses our own artistic bent. Still there are others – like the one she follows as a color consultant.

"I specialize in creativity, which allows me to land in any medium," she says with an infectious smile, "including in my clothing." This she says as we sit in her office and studio in her home along the river in Stockton, N.J.

So often, she says, artists are pigeonholed into niches. "It's not that simple. Fifteen years ago, you had to specialize. I felt I was in a closet. Now it's okay to wear different hats. But that's really what it means to lead a creative life. Now there are no boundaries."

Whether she's painting, creating murals or clothing, cooking or dancing, she says, they all feed one another. For example, she says, some of her skirts are patterned after her paintings, taking on a Dadaism and Russian Constructionism feel,

and they draw from her understanding of collage found in her murals.

"I'm very interested in collage and recycling," she says. "It's in my DNA. I just can't waste anything ... can't throw things out. And I think that's part of growing up in a family with parents who are artists. You resourcefully transcend the materials at hand through your creativity." (Both of Barger's parents were well-known Bucks County artists. Her father, Raymond Barger, was a sculptor; her mother, Lilius Barger, a painter and classical musician.)

Illia started her clothing company Pantaluna with her partner Glen Capelle more than three years ago. All the clothes are one-of-a-kind artwork and handmade from recycled T-shirts. Of the name, she says, she thought she had coined it, but, later, found a reference to the word as stemming from the belief that God and the universe are one. Though not a religious person, the meaning is in step with her concern and care for the planet. Even the logo she designed for Pantaluna is eco-conscious, a combination of mountains and moons.

Once she has the idea, Barger says, she can envision the painting, the mural or project whole cloth in her head. "It's as if it's already done." Laughing, she says, "It's like



Illia Barger opened a new Pantaluna store in Frenchtown, N.J., this fall.

the Emperor's Clothes. Can't understand why no one else sees it until I download it to canvas or cloth."

A case in point is her mural "Winds of Change" in Trenton depicting the first reading of The Declaration of Independence. Before she started the 33-foot by 65-foot mural she knew where she would place each figure, brick, shrub and tree from the plan she had preconceived in her mind. Once on site, she says, all she had to do was to determine where the sun was going to be. "Then everything followed." Even the large scale posed no problem.

"I'm not daunted by large canvases and murals. They fit my vision. My scale, my perspective is as a honeybee, so I see everything large in my head."

Like most of Illia's murals, the Trenton one is a *trompe l'oeil*.

"One of the successes of *trompe l'oeil* is to draw in someone two blocks away, who otherwise would not be interested in it. But they want to know what it is they're seeing. Is that real brick ... a real tree? The disbelief is the magic carpet that brings them there."



One of Illia Barger's services is as a color consultant.

After that, it's Barger's rendering of the subject that engages the viewer – perhaps leading to a new level of world understanding or self enrichment.

"All art is personal," she says. "'I get it'; 'I don't get it'. The final punctuation of what an artist offers is in giving something to the community. The point is to get your creative engine to make a difference in the world. That's the point of being an artist. Artists have a responsibility to stretch themselves, to expand ... to be a tapestry of creativity."

Barger's murals are found in homes, businesses and restaurants



"Eve," a flower painting by Illia Barger.



A mural in Trenton, "Winds of Change," depicts the first reading of the Declaration of Independence. Illia Barger created the large-scale work.

including Hamilton's Grill Room in Lambertville, N.J., and in public places, including her most recent in the Intensive Care Unit at the new Capital Health Hospital in Hopewell, N.J., and, come this spring, on Witherspoon Street in Princeton.

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