

“My basic belief in teaching is that someone who comes to an art class has a talent and I just have to discover what it is.”

Heeyoung Kim

Artists Discover Conservation, Education and Inspiration at Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods

When asked what is special about Heeyoung’s classes, student Dolores Diaz says, “She has walked the path. She excels.”

Excellence is the perfect word to summarize Heeyoung Kim and is perhaps the secret of her success. She wanted to become “the Midwest Margaret Mee,” the pioneering and world-renowned British artist who painted the flora of the Brazilian rainforest. Heeyoung recalls seeing Mee’s work at the Chicago Botanic Garden in 2007, “I lost my mind in that exhibit,” she remembers, “and stayed there with my magnifying glass until the room closed.”

Heeyoung did not start seriously painting until she was in her forties. As a young girl in Korea she learned about plants from her father who was an herbalist and a calligrapher, but it was not until she moved to the US and thought about making a children’s book that she took a drawing class. Her accomplishments in less than ten years are breathtaking. Her classes at Brushwood Center have become an incubator for emerging botanical who, under her guidance, are producing fine work that is exhibited and recognized internationally in addition to her own numerous exhibitions and publications (www.heeyoungkim.net).

With a strong emphasis on painting our native flora, rather than the gaudier horticultural plant varieties typically favored by the

art establishment, Heeyoung’s work and that of her students has become an avenue for conveying important conservation messages to new audiences. The exquisite beauty of her watercolors of prairie and woodland flowers has even influenced the taste of botanical societies. When her painting of a Compass Plant (*Silphium laciniatum*) received the “best of show” award in New York, painting wildflowers suddenly became more popular.

“I really like the supportive atmosphere of Brushwood Center,” Heeyoung says. “There is no set curriculum required here. People who come to this place are eager to feel the nature itself. Their mentality is different than just earning a certificate. Everyone is serious.” They are hard workers and that hard work is being rewarded by recognition.

Ramiro Prudencia is a perfect example. A retired physician, he has become a serious botanical artist through his work at Brushwood and has been in several prestigious exhibitions including the highly selective International American Society of Botanical Artists Exhibition in New York in November, 2016.

This January, more than 250 people attended the opening reception of the second annual Enriching Life at Brushwood Center, which featured the student’s work over the last year. We were thrilled to share their work with the Brushwood Center community.

