

# MEETING *the* CHALLENGE

BY GALE WALDRON



DANA B. THOMPSON

When Dana Thompson recalls her early years growing up in rural Hillsboro, she focuses immediately on her grandparents' Keystone Farm, her grandmother's art studio crammed with paint supplies and the satisfying smell of paint.

She well remembers her artist grandmother, Barbara Walker, a painter who was professionally schooled at Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts and who had taught at the Corcoran School of Art and Design in Washington, D.C., and the Racine Art Museum in Wisconsin. Grandmother Walker also gave private art lessons to her Hillsboro neighbors and friends, and those lessons were young Dana's introduction to the world of drawing and painting. "I knew from the beginning that I wanted to be an artist and that someday I would have a studio of my own," she says.

Early on, Dana drew and painted constantly, covering every square inch of her room with paintings, posters, cartoon figures and a large orange pop-art flower on the ceiling. Her parents gazed with wonder at the myriad of designs on her bedroom walls and provided constant support of her artistic ventures. As a student in Hillsboro's elementary school, she spent most of her time painting

scenes on the school's exterior windows, scenes that she painted anew for each season and the holidays. Throughout high school and college, the young artist continued her art quest, proving herself time and again to her teachers and mentors and, eventually, moving into the study of illustration and graphic design.

Those studies paved the way to a summer internship with *The*

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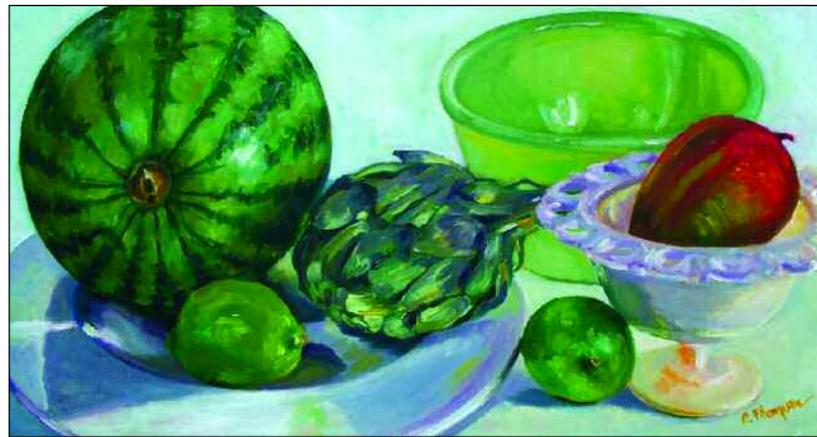
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FACING PAGE: "BEATERS," 22" x 28", OIL ON CANVAS





Loudoun Times-Mirror in Leesburg, which led later to a full-time job in that newspaper's art department. For the next 13 years, between leaves of absence to have children and raise a family and other graphic adventures, she worked for the Times newspapers group, eventually rising to the position of art director in 1994. "I didn't have any management experience and it was a little scary," she says with a smile, "but I like a challenge."



That's for sure. It is challenge that drives Dana Thompson to burrow down and rise to the occasion, always keeping her eye on the goal to be achieved. She grew steadily in her first management role with a personal style that earned respect from her staff and superiors, while it also gave her the opportunity to work on special advertising campaigns and marketing plans for corporate clients.

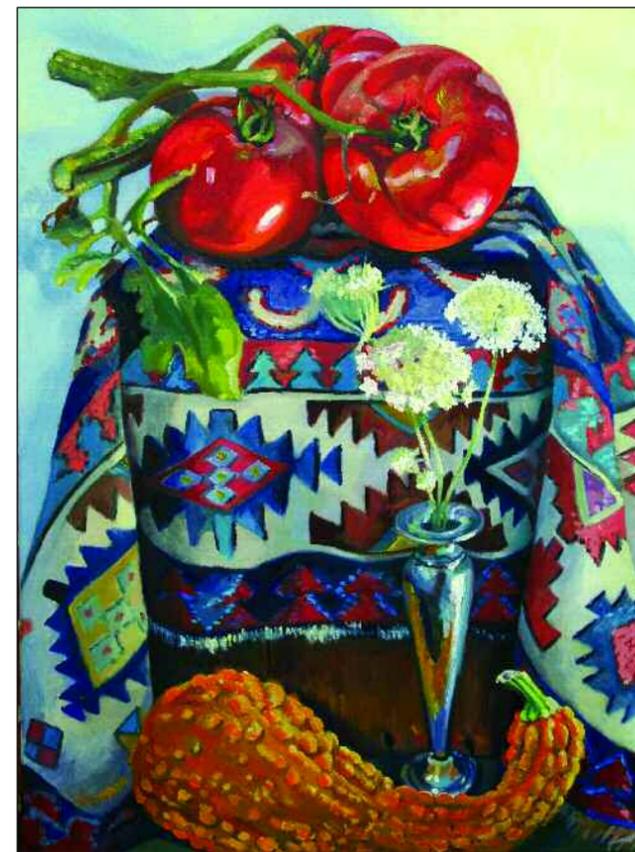
When she left the newspapers in 2004, she received a gift of an

oil painting class at the Loudoun Academy of the Arts in Leesburg and enrolled in a still life class with Kurt Schwarz (élan, May 2005). She has continued to study painting with Kurt and also with Maggie Siner (élan, December 2006/January 2007), learning from them how to use and mix color, layer paint and pay special attention to values, color, temperature and edges. In that timeframe, Dana was recruited to become Director of the Arts Academy where she has, once again, risen to the challenge of balancing an expansive art curriculum, a growing faculty of instructors and a growing body of art students. Also in that period, she has fulfilled her dream of studio space, becoming an artist at King Street Studios in Leesburg where, when she's off-duty from the demands of the school, she paints larger-than-life still lifes.

This artist knows her style. "I'm not an impressionist, but I don't

want to follow the Old Masters' style either," she explains. Currently, she is working toward refining her compositions and perfecting her brushstrokes. As for her subjects, it is often her sense of humor that drives painting such as "Beaters" and "Thin Skinned." "I don't want to be so serious," she says, "but I'd like the viewer to 'get it.'"

As she does with the rest of her life, Dana chooses to set up challenges in her paintings. She likes to paint glass, water and other transparent and translucent objects. She loves vintage imagery and is a regular at neighborhood yard sales where she scours the territory for old props. She combines these objects and other family pieces with fruits and vegetables, composing them with a discriminating eye and a bit of whimsy. She is also skilled at architectural renderings and has a large portfolio of historic homes in pen-and-ink produced over the last 25 years.



Dana has her eye on other goals she wants to accomplish someday. "I'd like to fulfill my dream to teach painting and to paint full-time," she claims. And then there's Paris—her life-long dream to visit that city and the Louvre.

For now, though, Dana is right on track and in no big hurry, knowing full well that she will reach those goals when she decides the timing is right. For today, she is surrounded by art and has a studio of her own, one that is crammed with paint supplies, her grandmother's vintage items and the satisfying smell of paint.

Additional examples of Dana's work can be viewed at [www.danathompsondesigns.com](http://www.danathompsondesigns.com).

FACING PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: "GREEN CHAIR," 30" x 48"; "RED BARK CLOTH," 18" x 24"; AND "MIXED GREENS II," 30" x 15"; THIS PAGE, TOP: "ENAMELWARE II," 36" x 24"; AND "CHRIS' TOMATOES," 18" x 24". ALL ARE OIL ON CANVAS.