



Kathleen O'Brien Studio
Spring 2020 Studio Tour



In early March one of my Italian dollies gave me the idea to take you on a virtual Spring 2020 Studio Tour. She's playful, I had to agree to photograph the scenes un-scripted, not designed. Well, the part she wanted to be featured in *was* designed, as you will see later in this story. The place was sort of a mess, unlike it's usual orderliness. For once desire for perfection was cast aside.

I create this hoping to amuse you. Ask me about things you are curious about if I don't mention something!



There's only one way into the studio. This is what you see, you are facing west. Above the shelves are some western cloudscapes in oils from the 1980's. And storage for supplies not in use. The rule is, if it's visible it has to be aesthetically pleasing so it's not distracting. When we designed the house the shelving bolts had to be planned and installed before the cement was poured into the Cempo walls.



Then if you look to your right, the north, you see the collage wall and work areas. *Love Letters to Henry Miller* was the project of the time, they are visible in unfinished state on the metal collage wall. Those windows are on the north, which gives a nice diffused lighting for working since I work in daylight.



The High Altar of the studio on the south wall. The workbench structure was made by my dad so long ago. I can't remember not having it. It is bolted, and has been moved many times. Larger flat art work and papers are stored below. Shipping stuff and Epson printer are hidden behind the curtains. Along the shelf are reminders of people who make me happy. Usually the flat surface is clear as a work space. Instead, there are presents to ship, art to go here and there and things to file.



It helps me to see a blank easel. Endless possibility. This one was my grandfathers, a treasure. I can't seem to part with those old coke boxes that have also gone from studio to studio over the years. They're so handy for storing small things. Another piece I can't remember not having is the music cabinet. It's a mini flat file for small art storage.



This is my secondary metal wall that holds the beginnings of my next series for Mothers Day with the theme of Madonna Lilies. On top of the music cabinet is a pencil box my dad made in 1970, another treasured heirloom. He used to make all my frames. My grandfather made the brush holder , on the upper right, to sit on the easel. The metal tubes are Cuban cigar tubes, he must have made it in the '50's.



The upper realms. There are some exceptions to my rule that if it is visible it must be pleasing to the sight. Or, it could be there is this one small area that still needs to be sorted as per winter tasks list.

But now it's spring, so maybe I can put it off. If you come in the kitchen door on the east, all you see are the two large angled cloudscapes *View from Haystack Mountain* and *Long Path to Peace*, 1988.

Below is my secret room, the only room in the house that's not painted white. On the walls are graphite drawings of birds and flowers from the 80's.



Along the west wall is the main workbench that has maximum tool and supplies storage. In the middle is the harvest table where I paint. Jean made the green shelf that stores lunchboxes that hold all my sewing and leather work things. On the north wall shelf are paint supplies and drawing boxes. Next is the bead station.



Back to the west workbench area. When we built the house we created deep reveals for the windows to allow my light in. The sills are wider because of this. This allows for mini altar space for useful items. The Picasso exhibit at KMAC was the last public event we attended before Covid-19 prevented such activity. I keep special correspondence from the year to look back on each birthday. There's a delegated box they go into underneath the bench.



My precious collection of Labyrinth Rocks painted freehand by old friend [Sherry Hart](#). She painted 1008 of them as a meditation. And a wood burned wood slice with LOVE by Phillip Gilbert. Lilac bushes outside are still bare. We were fully engaged with pruning them at that time.



Here's a plastic tray with a Gauguin painting that has a magnet to catch all sorts of hangers, nails and bits. The brass ducks love to hold my rolled paper down for me. The hawk feather was found on a trail, it sits in an ink well from Jean. Things my friends give me cheer me on the work day.



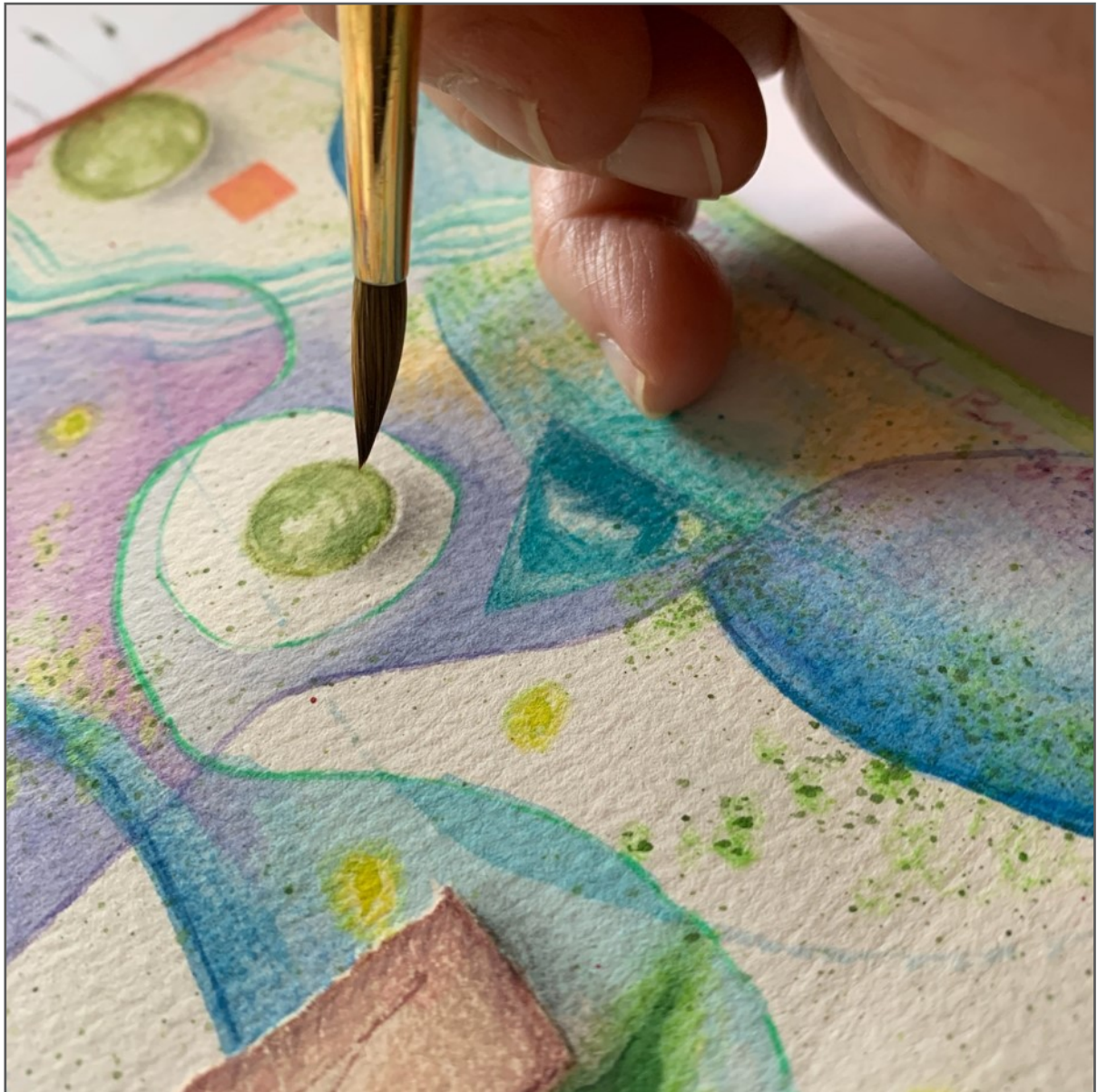
Old trusty ruler and antique brush hang on the deep reveal. A mini cubby unit holds Japanese ink boxes, boxes of stones, mica, push pins. I can't ever pass up a good box, small or large. On top are treasure boxes from the children, Japanese prints, elaborate origami, fox fetish from New Mexico. On the wall is a rooster painting by Chad Horn, a generous gift from his sketchbook.



Here's a detail of my corner shrine of specials. Top to bottom; pyramid collection in quartz, malachite and one on a Van Gogh mini puzzle box; colored pencil drawing (1970) in an easel frame, glass bird and lion fetish (2004); vintage Japanese dolls and figures, Coast Gallery Big Sur wish pencil, framed colored pencil drawing of Golden Rectangle (1974); various little antique books.



Trying to find the perfect pallet system, I found this one made by Robax in Florida. The feature that sold me was the movable paint chambers. The small round porcelain pallets are great for mixing analogous colors, and the dinner plate is good for cross mixing. My chart stays handy for making color choices.



Love Letters to Henry Miller 1, in progress with a number 6 Escoda Reserva travel brush.



Next to where I paint is my altar of helpers; two felted Corgi figures by Deborah Peckler, antique brass Buddha, crystal, bee happy candle from my daughter, angel from my sister-in-law, Barbara, Gemini doll from Sherry Hart for my 50th birthday, Harvest Doll that lights up made by Jean Pless that hold a tiny antique Japanese doll. Notice the peach tree just starting to blossom out the window.



Now we arrive at the place where the idea for the Spring 2020 Studio Tour began. I wanted to share my 2020 Mandala that culminated as a result of my annual *The Lotus and the Lily* December Retreat. It's based on a book by Janet Connor. The preparation for the year has helped me greatly to stay focused on my purpose through this challenging time. This is a mini version I printed so I could travel light to meet my second grandson in February. On the left is the full original size. The base is an 8 page fold out Target ad. This is the front, the mandala itself. In the center is "being of love". The four things I commit to each day are to create, move, trust and to laugh. Surrounding that are the eight things I aspire to gain as a result.



Opening the mandala, the left side opens out showing two pages that elaborate on how the aspirations look. The National Geo magazine ad was timely, as we had a new Prius so we would have “s**no**w” worries driving to Colorado in the winter. And yes we had fun. We have been feeling at peace and connected, healthy. On the inside right I declare this is “the Year of No Boundaries; it comes to me, I go forward.”



This is the opposite right side open. The Swim in the Sky cutout is from a 1978 exhibit. It represents me in the creative flow. Healthy food is set on the table. Drinking water I say my daily prayer. Some of the spirit guides target me for their help. On the inside left there are other prompts reminding me about connection and being empowered by guidance, and ironically aspiring to Open Studios like normal.



The Mandala is fully opened to the inside pages.



This is the back cover of the Mandala. My husband awarded me the Lifetime Achievement Award. More elaborative pictures to remind me of drawing and writing, eating well, resting with feet up and love.



Three seasons; Christmas Cactus on the sill, summer in the hammock, peach tree starting to blossom. An Ostrakon and box of them from virtual Alexandria Librarian [Nona Orbach](https://kathleen-obrien.com/art/). They sit on top of candy boxes á la Joseph Cornell. What's inside?



Taking a step back to widen the view of the north wall. The drawing table works well for writing in the journals. The enamel table will go outside in the warm months to paint, draw and write on the porch.



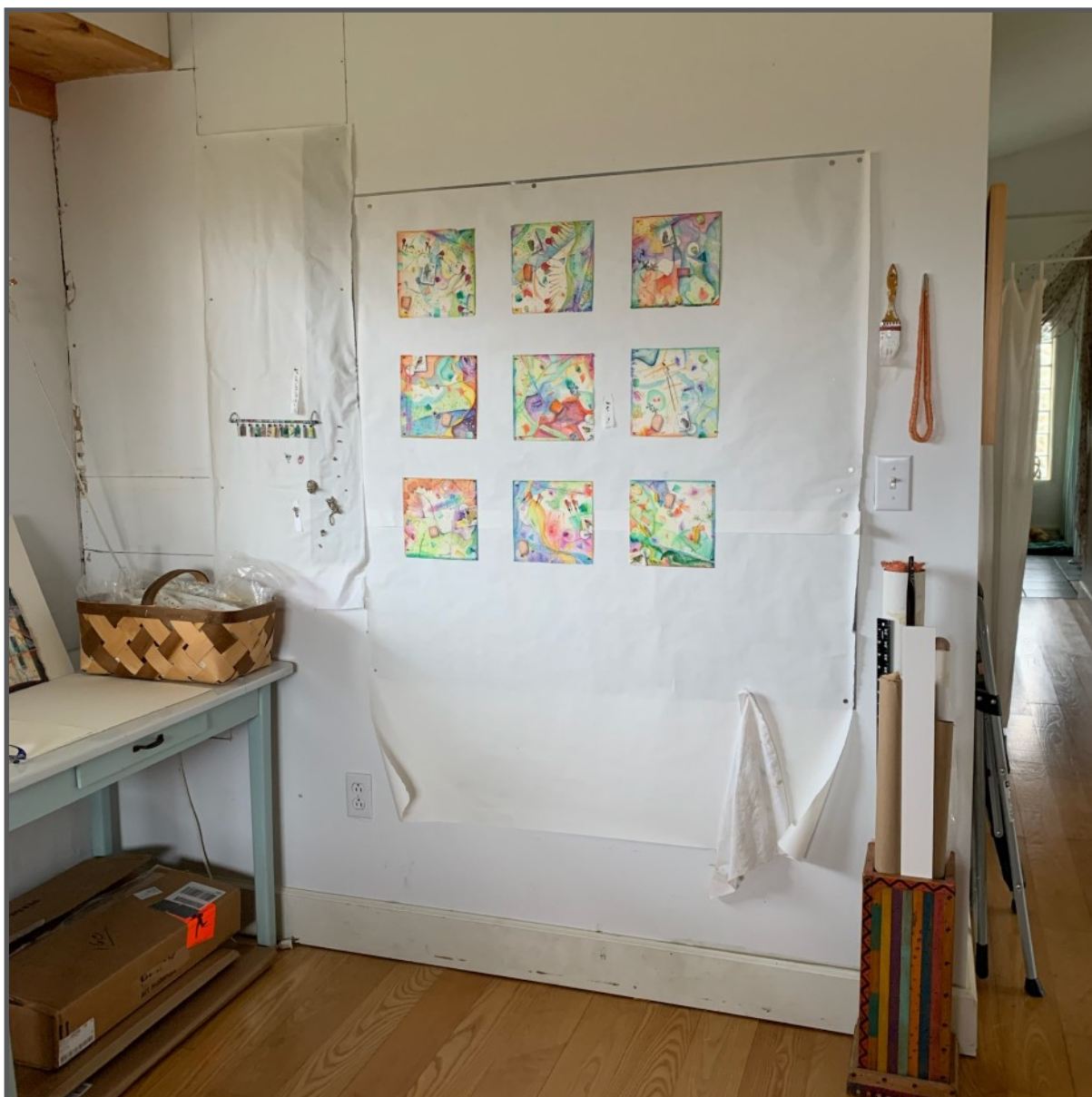
This set of drawers has gone through several repurposes in it's life with the studio. It was great for colored pencils until I had about 800. Now it stores the beads I string for jewelry. I use a smaller container for a current project. The index card box holds my monthly prompts for [Atlas of the Year](https://kathleen-obrien.com/art/) program.



This is the northeast corner of the studio. The dry wall is back in place after cutting it out to install new electric cables to connect electricity to the studio annex. We still need to tape the cuts, something that's easy to not notice. The basket holds various painted paper scraps that I can consider for collage using magnets. Seen here are three unfinished paintings from the *Love Letters to Henry Miller* series.



On the table is *Always Merry and Bright, Book of Light* pages 164, 165, 166, (created in 2010) my all time favorite artwork that I wrote about in the [March 23 blog post](#). It was inspired by Henry Miller and his motto, “always merry and bright” and then in turn it was what I reflected on in creating the *Love Letters to Henry Miller* collection.



This is the east wall with the second stage of *Love Letters to Henry Miller* series. Rolls of Japanese and Glassine papers, rulers and mahl stick are in a fun stand from Berea. I have a small collection of Brush Art, and sometimes it prompts me to see beads work with like the salmon colored 2,000 year old Fairwind beads from India.



This is the farthest one can see of the east wall from the west side.



One can see from the north—west corner to the south—east corner of the building, as planned. It's like being inside a sundial here. I experience it as a living art work, along with the gardens. But that's another story, about Sunwise Farm and Sanctuary. All nine of the *Love Letters to Henry Miller* are complete.



Later, sunset. I've enjoyed showing you around on today and how this time of year is experienced here, inside and out.....



Kathleen O'Brien, *Love Letters to Henry Miller 4*, one of nine collaged paintings, 7.5 x 7.5"

Love Letters to Henry Miller
by Kathleen O'Brien
has its own page.
[Click here!](#)