

# Armed with a paintbrush

## Men, women of U.S. military immortalized by T.O. artist



BY MICHELE MANDEL, TORONTO SUN

FIRST POSTED: SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2009 03:18 AM EDT | UPDATED: SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2009 06:07 AM EDT



### Artist Katherine Dolgy Ludwig with U.S. Marine Clifton Sams at U.S. Armed Forces offices in Manhattan, N.Y. (Sofia Ludwig photo)

A Toronto artist is the unlikely toast of New York City's Fleet Week.

Katherine Dolgy Ludwig has captured the essence of London bobbies and Playboy bunnies, and now the former Ontario College of Art and Design teacher has trained her brush on the U.S. Armed Forces and her first 15 U.S. Navy portraits went on exhibit this week at the National Arts Club to commemorate New York's annual celebration of the sea services.

"This is a project that has deep meaning for me as a painter," she explains from Brooklyn. "They each give of themselves every day to public service, sometimes at great personal sacrifice."

The prolific painter divides her time between her "heavenly" studio on Toronto Island, her Allenby home and her New York apartment. For this project, she set up shop in a military office last March and saw a parade of men and women willing to pose for an intimate two hours of laughter and conversation as she painted their portraits.

"I loved it," recalls U.S. Navy Lt.-Cmdr. Suzanna Brugler, who helped launch the project and also posed for Dolgy Ludwig. "She's so passionate and she has a way of capturing the essence of people that is absolutely beautiful."

Once other branches of the military saw her navy paintings, they clamoured to be involved as well. The artist now wakes most mornings at 5 a.m., bicycles over the Williamsburg bridge and paints from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. By the time she's finished her enormous project, she will have painted 75 vibrant 22" by 30" watercolours of navy, marines, army, air force and coast guard personnel of all ranks and backgrounds.

"Why is an artist from Toronto here doing these paintings?" Dolgy Ludwig asks. "My perception is that we're in a kind of world art dialogue. No one is limited by where they're from. We're all in it together."

Her vibrancy and energy pulsate across the long distance line. Coy about her age, she's mom to four teenagers -- Claudia, 18, and 16-year-old identical twins Charles and Barnett live at home with dad, Sam, who is a Grade 3 teacher in Rosedale -- and Sofia, 13, who she homeschools with her in New York. Her life is a hectic back and forth bounce between her beloved husband and children in Toronto and her blossoming art career in the Big Apple.

"I have to be in a place to do the work," she explains. "Many artists can work from photos. I can't. I need the inner life of the subject to jump out at me."

She's known to ride around New York on her bike with her Spider-Man lunch box of paints, stopping complete strangers so she can paint them on the street. She decided a long time ago that she couldn't afford to pay live models, so her subjects are often her family and real people in the community. "Who has the best faces? Cops and soldiers," she says. "They've seen a lot."

### TRUE CALLING

Dolgy Ludwig, with four degrees to her credit, didn't set out to be an artist. She graduated as an architect and her husband worked in business, but both realized that they were not pursuing their true callings. He quit to become a teacher and she

was accepted to the prestigious Chelsea College of Art and Design of the London Institute to do her masters in fine arts.

It was an opportunity her husband didn't want her to pass up. He couldn't abandon his job and the twins didn't want to leave their friends, so the boys stayed in Toronto while she and the girls spent 2004 in London.

On her return, she taught at OCAD and was invited to paint at Artscape on Toronto Island. She turned her international focus from London to New York, a venue closer to home, and in 2007 was awarded a fellowship at A.I.R. Gallery in Chelsea.

Thrilled, she packed up a truck with her paintings, but got no further than the Peace Bridge where she was turned away for not having a proper visa. After sending out 80 letters seeking support and selling a painting just in time to pay an immigration lawyer, she finally got a special artist's visa that allowed her to accept the fellowship.

Dolgy Ludwig hasn't looked back since. That year, one of her paintings, NewYorkIsABrickHouse!, won the guest critic's award at the New York National Arts Club, and in 2008 her painting Liberty&ManhattanSkyLine1 was chosen by Mayor Michael Bloomberg's office to represent Immigrant Heritage Week.

"If you put in the work, good things do happen and I've been lucky," she admits. "I'm just doing everything as fast as I can," she adds with her trademark laugh. "All those degrees, all those children, all those paintings. I'm just trying so hard."

She's especially proud of these portraits of the American Armed Forces and hopes others will see the "bigness" of their characters shine through. "I push paint on paper -- it's not saving lives, bringing free elections, getting women their rights, or building roads and electrical systems -- but it's what I can do. I make paintings that show the individuals humanity within the mythic or stereotyped image of uniforms."

She's decided that none of the vibrant watercolours will be for sale because they have a collective meaning as a whole. "I own the paintings and the copyright but it's my great pleasure to loan them to the Armed Forces whenever they choose.

"After all," she laughs, "who better to protect my work than the military?"

READ MANDEL EVERY SUNDAY, THURSDAY AND FRIDAY. MICHELE.MANDEL@SUNMEDIA.CA OR 416-947-2231

[If you're 50+ read this](#) 

[instaflex.com](http://instaflex.com)

Doctors are shocked by this 10 second joint pain trick

## SPONSORED LINKS

---



### Up to 90% Debt Reduction.

Sinking in debt? We can help!

Click here & start today!



### Ambrosia Natural Foods

CANADA'S #1 NATURAL FOODS STORE MAKES EATING HEALTHY AFFORDABLE

[WWW.AMBROSIA.CA/SPECIALS/](http://WWW.AMBROSIA.CA/SPECIALS/)



### SWIMMING POOLS DIRECT

Pools/Patio Furniture, Hot Tubs Factory Direct

Click here for specials!

[See All Sponsored Links](#)