

Dusti Pearson Williams
words: Ellen Gurley

Some people get to grow up in the same town their whole lives. Sometimes they get to go to the same elementary school and the same junior high school with some of the same people. Sometimes they even get to go to the same high school with those with whom they shared their elementary and middle school years. And then, if they're lucky, social media will keep them in touch with those someones after graduation. For me, one of those someones is Dusti Pearson Williams. We went to Cotswold, Billingsville, Randolph, and West Charlotte together and now I get to watch her be a doting wife and an amazing artist... through Facebook.

I was lucky enough to take a short drive to Concord, where Williams' studio and residence are both located, to sit a spell and see what she does. It is a shared space with her sister, Brandi McKenna, with whom she not only shares a venue and creative bones, but they also *get to* share the stigma and annoyance of MS. With their good days and their bad days, art is always at the center. Each with her varying degrees of difficulty, they perfectly and competently run a shared business (Harlan McKenna Designs) and an optimistic outlook that is apparent throughout their brand.



Each of William's creations are like an affirmation; a promise that there is beauty in all things. Often using the skulls of animals that she has just found, literally, at her feet, she puts new life into everything she touches. No stranger to the rummaging and walking about at flea markets, that is required to harvest her components for her assemblage pieces, she finds her muses here and there. While most of Harlan McKenna Designs' work is in restoration (Dusti is always sanding and staining vintage farm tables, etc.), trumeaus, interiors like mirrors, over mantles, and screens, their one-of-a-kind sculptures, jewelry, seasonal decorations, and paintings get a lot of their time and attention. We are glad that they do.



In her warehouse, as far as the eye can see, there are working surfaces with old broaches and funky pins, pieces of fabric, nature finds, and display cases full of her creations. At any given time, there are more than thirty things that Williams has in the works... and they are everywhere. I tried not to touch anything but after construction, her pieces are good to go and sturdy.

My City Magazine promises to stalk McKenna and get some of her art in print, perhaps around one of these autumns. Her Halloween pieces are literally the cutest things ever. We may even bug William's husband (of local Biggy Stardust fame), but in the meantime, check out these one-of-a-kind creations by her. Harlan McKenna Design's catalog is ever changing and available at their website and sometimes the girls make an appearance the second Saturdays of the month at the ClearWater Artist Studios' open house. Grab some of these conversation pieces and keepsakes now. Supporting local never looked cooler.

Photographed here:

- two different carved goat skull necklaces, a sister pair - one with a crown, one with a chandelier
- a mixed media assemblage in a drawer box
- three WIPs at different stages, goat, deer and goat
- a baroque assemblage necklace
- a vintage porcelain fop mounted on vintage silver stampings and forming his masquerade get-up

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