

A Different Breed of Art

Aimee Shaw paints whimsical portraits of beloved pets to raise money for her north Mississippi dog rescue operation.

WRITTEN BY Melanie Crownover | PHOTOGRAPHED BY Joe Worthem



Aimee Shaw discovered a new talent while searching for a creative way to raise funds for the pit bull rescue operation she started. She began painting colorful portraits of people's beloved pets and selling them to raise money to support the operation. The artwork is sold online and at local festivals and regular events, including the Tupelo Flea Market.

THE LARGER-THAN-LIFE DOG PAINTING hanging in the playroom of Lori Davis's Jayeff, Miss., home is more than just lively decor to amuse her grandchildren. For Davis, the

brightly colored image is an homage to a family friend.

"Rocco was an American pit bull terrier I raised from when I bottle-fed him until he was

2½. When we had to put him down back in May, I was heartbroken. I knew when I wanted his portrait done I would have to get Aimee Shaw to do it," she said. "Her work is amazing,



Aimee Shaw's pet portraits don't just feature pit bulls; she also paints beloved pets and other animals, including cats, lizards, horses and even favorite SEC mascots. She hand-paints piggy banks and sells other merchandise like calendars and T-shirts decorated with her whimsical artwork.

but I know the money goes to helping her other bullies."

Shaw, a full-time graphic designer, began painting the portraits to fund her passion: rescuing dogs with Shaw Pit Bull Rescue in New Hope, Miss. Proceeds from the portrait sales help provide food, medical care and shelter for the dogs the rescue operation supports.

"The whole operation started with me finding a stray mama pit guarding her dead pup at the river one day. I just couldn't leave her there like that," Shaw said. "My husband, Kenneth, and I agreed to take in one or two dogs at a time, and before we knew it we had 69 dogs to love. I think we've adopted out

120 since we started, so now we're down to a roomy 33."

The dogs live outdoors in a space that includes wire kennels with pea gravel floors and a doggie play yard. About a year ago, the couple decided to renovate the current rescue setup into a professional-grade indoor/outdoor facility. The renovation project inspired Shaw to pick up her paintbrushes to raise money.

First, she decorated piggy banks. Then she started painting pit bulls in vivid acrylic on 11-by-14-inch and 16-by-20 inch canvases, using members of her pack as models.

Soon online patrons began sending special requests for likenesses of their favorite



animals. Orders included a menagerie of pets, from tortoises, tree frogs and koi fish to special orders for paintings of SEC mascots.

Now Shaw takes her piggy banks, paintings and other products, such as calendars and T-shirts, featuring her pit bull art to local festivals and regular shows like the Tupelo Flea Market. The publicity spreads awareness of the rescue and increases demand for the portraits.

"All they have to do is get me a good close-up of their animal and let me know what colors they like, what size they need and how abstract they want it," Shaw said. "I'll paint just about anything for the dogs."

Within days of sending in her shot of

Rocco, Davis's portrait was hanging in her house. Now she's thinking of getting one of Shaw's more abstract depictions of her lost pooch to accompany the first.

"Our family fell in love with that portrait the minute we saw it because she somehow captured the essence of who he was in that bright paint. As someone who has been rejected and had a great family dog excluded because of his breed, I know the level of prejudice their rescue faces," Davis said. "This is just one beautiful way to give them a chance."

For more information on Shaw's rescue operation or to order her artwork, visit shawpitbullrescue.com.

Shaw Pit Bull Rescue started when Aimee Shaw rescued one stray dog. Since then, the operation has adopted out 120 dogs and currently houses around 30. Money raised through Shaw's artwork goes toward food, medical care and shelter for the dogs the rescue operation supports.