

# THE LAUREL OF ASHEVILLE

THE ARTS AND CULTURE OF COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

## Feature Artist: Pamella O'Connor



(Left) Driftwood Dream 1; (Right) Driftwood Dream 2. Pamella O'Connor, artist

By Gina Malone

Pamella O'Connor traces her love of artistry directly back to her mother who raised six children, cooked fabulous meals and expressed her creativity in their Iowa home. "With very little money, she created a lovely home for us and I believe a good bit of my creative instinct flows directly from her," Pamella says, recalling a "stained glass" look her mother created on windows using colored tissue paper. "I thought it was beautiful. I marveled at how she had imagined that and brought it to life. And at the age of seven, I witnessed her knock down a wall in our home to open the living room space up. She was tough and creative!" Despite the creativity she modeled, "I am the only one in the family who has pursued a life in the arts," Pamella says. "Everyone else made much more reasonable choices."



The Wave. Pamella O'Connor, artist

Pamella's life in the arts began with theater. With the encouragement of an eighth-grade teacher, she embraced school plays, carrying that love through high school and then majoring in Theater in college. "I spent 30 years of my professional life as a theater artist," Pamella says. "Over the course of that career, I acted, directed and produced traditional as well as puppet theater. My move to Asheville was precipitated by my desire to be a self-generating artist, creating my own work and stories through puppetry."

When grants dried up during the 2008 financial crisis, she took a job in South Korea that allowed her to teach English using puppetry. "While there, I fell in love with their handmade paper and one particular application—flower lamps," she says. "I sought out a master of this craft and studied with her for nine months. I have always appreciated soft, ambient lighting in my home, so this craft really spoke to my soul." She launched her business, Hanji Home, in 2012, after receiving a Merit Award and Emerging Artist Grant to attend the Buyer's Market of American Craft, in Philadelphia. Twenty-five galleries placed orders with her while she was there.

Her craft is labor-intensive and she works on multiple lamps at the same time. The bases often suggest the lamp's eventual design. "I love exotic woods, driftwood and unique objects for my bases and the challenge of creating these one-of-a-kinds gives me great pleasure," she says.



5 Poppies on black walnut. Pamella O'Connor, artist

The flowers are built of acetate, and covered with paper. "Then I am ready to insert the socket, attach the bonsai wire stem, build the neck, add leaves and cover all with multiple layers of paper," Pamella says. "In the end, everything the hand touches on the flower is Hanji paper, but it is the substructures I use that make them highly shippable. They are strong and durable. A large part of my business is custom orders, so I am delighted that they ship so well."

When someone once told her that it seemed as if her lamps wanted to talk, they weren't far from what goes through Pamella's mind as she creates. "Perhaps it is my puppetry and theatre background, but I often think of my flowers as characters and a design like a small vignette," she

says. “Each piece is named.” She has, she decided, found a new end product for the energy she always put into creating characters for the stage.

“In this time of political discord, AI-generated words and images, and social discontent, I believe that art is a salve, a way of softening, opening, healing and inspiring,” Pamela says. “I would like this reading audience to know that we, the arts community of Asheville, are working hard to make the RAD and the whole local arts scene as vibrant and welcoming as possible. Come see us.”

*See Pamela O’Connor’s work at the Grovewood Gallery, in Asheville, and at 362 Depot, in the River Arts District. Learn more at [HanjiHome.net](http://HanjiHome.net). 362 Depot is open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day, and O’Connor will meet clients there by appointment.*