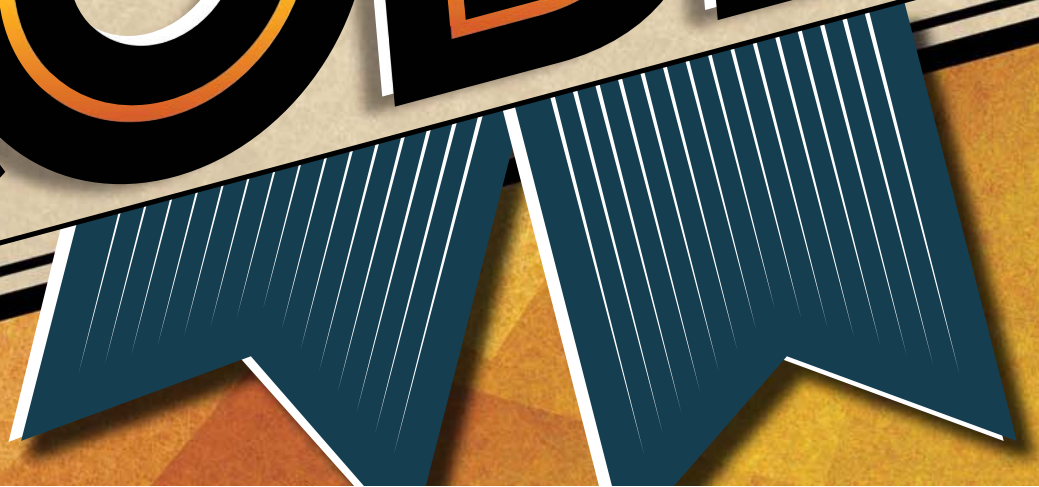


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“LET THEM EAT CAKE!”

Austell artist Laura Shull has revived the story of Marie Antoinette by painting the queen devouring cake by the handfuls.

LOCAL ARTIST HITS THE SWEET SPOT WITH LUSH PAINTINGS

WRITTEN BY AMANDA MORRIS

According to legend, when Queen of France Marie Antoinette was told her subjects had no bread, she apathetically replied, “Let them eat cake.”

More than two centuries later, Austell artist Laura Shull has revived this story by painting the queen devouring cake by the handfuls. The opulence for which Marie Antoinette was reviled is transferred into the lush painting through her dress, her hair and even the cake itself. The title of Laura’s piece is simply, “Cake.”

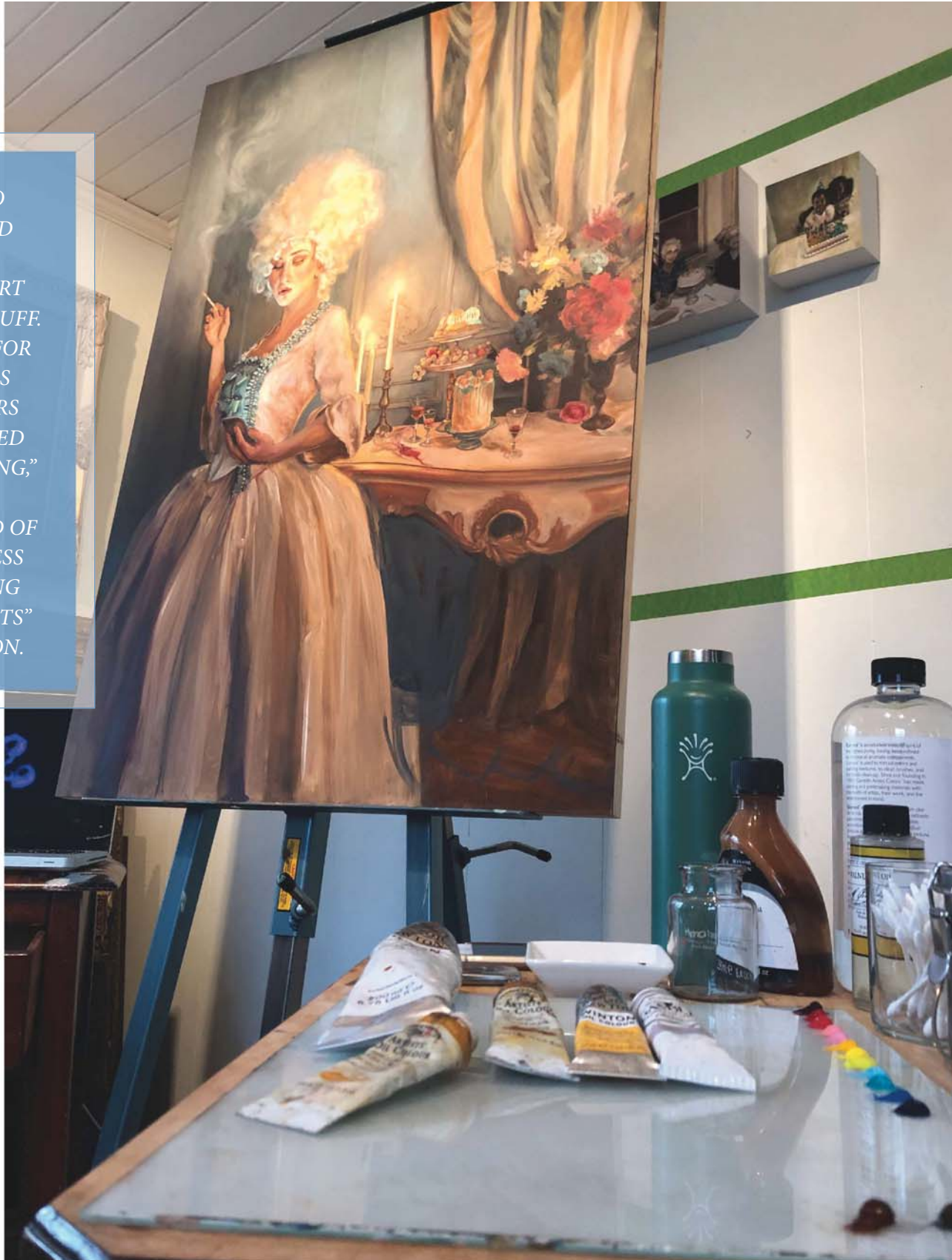
For her piece, Shull was inspired by the Rococo style, popular in 18th century France. The style is defined by elaborate ornamentation, pastel and gold colors and playful, even witty themes.

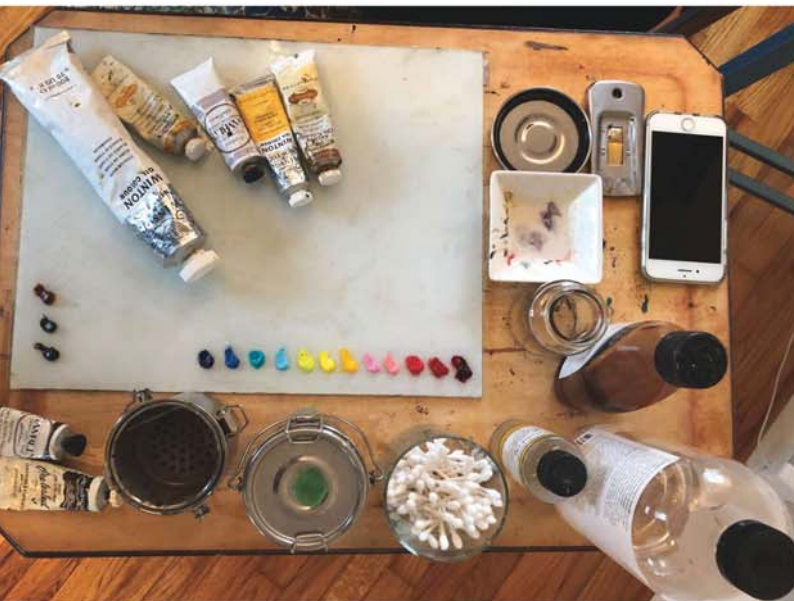
“I really love how everything is ornate and organic and over-the-top,” the 32-year-old said. In “Cake,” Shull skillfully employs the Rococo style - the overindulgence of the cake, the lush brushstrokes, the richness of the fabric and the curvy frills of her dress are all classic elements of the style.

“Cake,” however, does not stand alone. The painting belongs to a series of Shull’s paintings called, “Sweets.” Another delectable painting in this



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series is named, “Dessert Still Life.”

“I went to Publix and piled a whole cart full of stuff. I looked for the shapes and colors and looked at the icing,” Shull explained of her process in creating the “Sweets” collection. After buying the pastries and desserts, she meticulously arranged them and painted the still life models before her.

“The Party” is another surprising, century-crossing piece, which showcases a young lady at an 18th century party. Behind her are the lavish abundances of the time: the silky draperies, the spilled glass of wine and the decadent desserts. But creating relevance to modern times, Shull has depicted the young lady scrolling on her phone.

“I like the idea of a girl from that period at a party and she’s bored. Today, we just scroll through our phone. But it’s contrasted with that time period,” she explained.

For Laura, setting the scene of her paintings is an enjoyable part of the painting process. The process starts with an idea floating around in her head before she sketches the idea. After a rough sketch, she moves on to gathering reference material or props.

“I like to look at the actual thing to make the painting feel realistic, as realistic as I can,” she said.

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The next step is to assemble the reference material and ask someone to model for her. She will then do a photo shoot and paint from those photos.

There have been times that she couldn't find the perfect reference material to buy, so she made it herself. A wall with detailed trim work in one painting is actually a backdrop of cloth that she hand-painted. Those delicious-looking sweets are hand-made using various mediums. Antique shops, eBay and yard sales became good friends to Shull as she sought the perfect set of glassware or candlesticks for the scene.

"It takes forever for me to get everything done, because I focus on all these little details," Shull said. "There's probably an easier way for me to do all of this, but I actually really like the fact that it's labor intensive."

Scattered around her studio are the items you will find in her paintings, including the two-lay-



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SCATTERED AROUND HER STUDIO ARE THE ITEMS YOU WILL FIND IN HER PAINTINGS, INCLUDING THE TWO-LAYERED DESSERTS THAT SHE MADE OUT OF EXPANDABLE SPRAY FOAM, THE MACARONS SHE MADE OUT OF CLAY AND THE VASE FILLED WITH LARGE, BRIGHT FLOWERS.

ered desserts that she made out of expandable spray foam, the macarons she made out of clay and the vase filled with large, bright flowers. Her studio is designed to inspire her and is filled with her antique shop and yard sale finds. A telephone table is repurposed into her painting table with her paint brushes lined up neatly on the shelf that once held phone books, her pallet and paints easily accessible on the table top.

An oversized mirror with a Rococo-looking frame is located opposite her easel, reflecting light into the room. "I wanted to make the light move around the room. The house is older and I like that kind of vintage feel. I wanted it to feel cozy in here, to try to have things displayed to inspire me," she said.

Shull's studio is in her house, in Austell, which she shares with her husband, Matt, and rests just miles from where she grew up in Marietta. As a kid, Shull was always drawing and doodling. It wasn't until she took a required class in high school that she found her love of painting. In college, she learned the skills of oil painting. Once she learned

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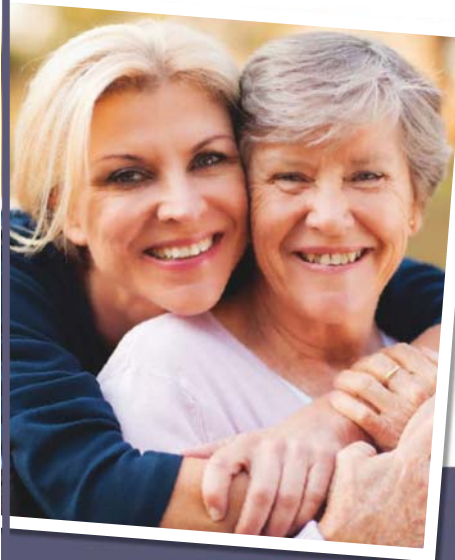
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how to use the materials, oil painting came naturally to her. After grasping the technical side of painting, she began to learn about anatomy and how the body moved. Life-drawing classes at Kennesaw State University—where she earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing—were essential.

“Life-drawing classes made things click for me,” she said. “I would try to copy pictures from magazines, but you can’t look at a full body and how it’s moving and see people’s muscles.”


Laura’s paintings have exhibited locally at the Marietta/Cobb Art Museum and in various other exhibits throughout the Southeast. Over the years, she has witnessed the artist support in the Cobb County community and, specifically, Marietta. Her first sale was of a painting she had hanging in Kiosco, a Colombian restaurant on the Marietta Square. She currently has prints for sale in Cool Beans Coffee, also on the Marietta Square.

Shull’s latest project is a series titled, “Birth-day.” The series is based on vintage photos she has collected with the central theme of a birthday party. “They make me incredibly happy. I love the cake being the one anchoring visual element in all of them,” she said.

Some of Shull’s favorite paintings to create have been portraits and commissioned work. “I really love doing portrait paintings, any kind of portraiture, and I’m always open to commissions,” she said. Among others, commissioned works include portraits of the founders of Rohadfox Construction and a piece for Velvet Tacos in Texas.

Rest assured, Shull has plans to return to the ever-popular “Sweets” series.

“I have so many ideas that I have not started yet,” she explained, adding that people have responded very well to the series and especially to “Cake.” “Women have told me, ‘I love it, because she just doesn’t care. She’s just doing what she wants and it make me feel empowered.’ It’s really interesting to see people take your paintings and have their own memories that they attach to it. I love that.”

For more information on the series and the artist, visit LauraShull.com. 



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