

# Nature through the Artist's Eye: Jenny Hyde-Johnson

Jenny Hyde-Johnson's South African home is in a spectacular World Heritage Site, "The Cradle of Humankind," with many subjects to inspire her painting. She trained in graphic design and co-owned and ran a studio for over 25 years before moving to this beautiful area, just a stone's throw from where she was born in Johannesburg.

Since 2005, she has painted full time. For nine years, her bird paintings have exhibited and toured in the prestigious Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum's Birds in Art exhibitions in the USA. Her animal paintings hung in London with the David Shepherd Foundation's Wildlife Artist Exhibitions from 2009 to 2014 where she received a "highly commended" designation in 2010. Her botanical work has graced calendars, garden guides, and other publications including *Flowering Plants of Africa*. She received Gold Medals in the 2006, 2008, and 2013 Kirstenbosch Botanical Art Biennale as well as the 21st World Orchid Congress. Her artwork is in the public collections of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum (LYWAM), and the Hunt Institute of Botanical Documentation (USA), and the Shirley Sherwood Collection housed at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (UK) as well as many private collections worldwide.

To learn more about Hyde-Johnson and to see more of her work, visit [www.jennyhyde-johnson.com](http://www.jennyhyde-johnson.com)



## Brunsvigia Celebration

Acrylic on canvas, 24"x18", 2016

Over 3,500 wildflower species are found in the South African Highveld. While most blooms are small and insignificant due to the harsh climate, some, such as the *Brunsvigia radulosa* or tumbleweed, put on a spectacular show. Bursting like a firework display against the golden veld, its flowering celebrates life. This burst of energy costs the plant dearly; it flowers only every second or third year but can live a century or more. Sadly, the average age for the Common Waxbill is only three to four years. These little jewels light up the understory of the grasslands. When flushed, they fly up and settle on grass tops, teetering in the breeze, trying to identify what disturbed their world. I often hide a couple of creatures in my paintings and the butterfly depicted here is an *Iolais bowkeri* (Bowker's Sapphire).

(This painting is currently on the LYWAM's year-long tour and can be viewed at Fullerton Arboretum, Fullerton, California. (December 8 - January 25, 2018).



## Diamonds and Rust

Acrylic on canvas, 9"x32.5", 2015

Diamonds and Rust was inspired by my American friend Marysue; she visited Namaqualand, South Africa where my grandparents grew up. It's a poor, arid area yet rich in plants, reptiles, insects, and minerals. The setting sun highlights a diamond-prospecting boat still working near the mouth of the harbor. The vacuum hose, manipulated by a diver, floats on the surface and conveys seabed gravel back to the boat for sorting. A history of great wealth from copper and diamond rushes followed by abandonment, rusty piers, rickety docks, and the odd ghost made me think of the title of a favorite Joan Baez song, which is best played as the day draws to an end and a nostalgic mood creeps into one's heart. The two gulls are Hartlaub's Gulls, common to the southern and western coastal areas of South Africa.



## Geese and the Golden Eggs

Acrylic on canvas 14.5"x21.5", 2013

Four inches of rain pelted down over two days in January; by the third day it waned to a fine drizzle as we explored the Roodeplaat Dam for possible fishing spots for my aging father and came across this floating barrier. Bright yellow buoys enlivened the gray day and the waterbirds that seemed weary of being wet. Frumpish Egyptian Geese preened and shook out their petticoats of under feathers, while others took a nap. I love painting lines of birds in different poses and the buoy line presented just such a platform. To give a feeling of limited space and rhythm, I placed the geese close together, half-balancing one on the buoy to add a comical aspect.