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## Animal Magnetism - Pet artist turns hobby into full-time job

By ROB MEINTJES

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By age 2, Deanna Lewis was drawing, an activity recorded in a family photo of her busy with a sketchbook on her mother's lap. Diagnosed with asthma at that age, Deanna didn't get to play outside or own pets. So she made up for it by drawing animals. Lions, tigers and wildebeests grew from her busy pencil.

Four decades later, her asthma under control thanks to modern medicine, Lewis is again focusing on her art and love of nature — symbolized by the paw print of a wolf that she uses as a trademark on all her drawings, below her signature. The part-Cherokee artist chose the name Wolfpaw for herself when she was a child.



Photo by ROB MEINTJES

Today, however, drawing animals has grown from a part-time endeavor into Lewis' full-time career. "*The Nation's Premier Pet Portrait Artist*," is the claim that greets visitors to her Web site at [www.petportraitsforyou.com](http://www.petportraitsforyou.com), beneath the portrait of a schnauzer whose melting expression rivals that of Puss In Boots in "Shrek 2." "Order Early for Valentine's Day!" the schnauzer's caption read recently, with the shrewd marketing instinct you would expect from a former office manager of a financial planning firm. In January 2004, Lewis quit her management job to do portraits full-time and has completed 100 since June. Her pencil portraits sell for \$225 to \$300.

She is also developing her own weekly TV show [*"Capital Pets with Deanna"*] with Fairfax Channel 10. "I love my boss - myself!" she says. "Every day is a dream. I was scared as hell when I quit but I should have done it 20 years ago." Lewis, a self-taught artist, who is also gay, has had no formal training aside from a private tutor in oil painting when she was a teenager.



A log fire is crackling in her studio in Burke, Virginia. Outside the glass doors, beyond the wooden deck she built, are woods frequented by deer, raccoons and foxes. Before the fire, on the floor Lewis tiled herself, sits an antique drawing table, which she recently found at an upstate New York dealer: a turn of the century student architect's table, pitted with pinholes, on a sturdy cast-iron base.

Lewis is diversifying her products from the studio overlooking the woods. Works in progress include a children's book, "*The Rescue of Sebastian Bluebird*." Illustrated and written by the artist, it features a bluebird who is rescued in Charlottesville, Virginia., before going on a voyage of discovery [where he meets four kittens, Liberty, Freedom, Equality and Justice homeless on the streets of Washington, D.C. Sebastian visits Pennsylvania to learn about the writing of the Constitution], and in upstate New York he perches on the statue of Sybil Ludington, the young woman who rode through the night in 1777 to alert revolutionary forces to the sacking of Danbury by British troops. "And you thought it was just Paul Revere who said, 'the British are coming,'" Lewis says.

"I try to see things through the eyes of a child. Sebastian Bluebird is discovering the world, and the history of the United States and so am I, through eyes a bit older and wiser."