

MEET IRINA SMULEVITCH

LOCAL ARTIST AND TEACHER REFLECTS ON HER JOURNEY

*Writer / Heather Hunter
Photographer / Justin Sicking*

To the Village of WestClay, Irina Smulevitch is a treasured friend and multitalented artist who owns Carmel Art Education Studio. But to many of her younger students, she is known simply as Miss Irina.

“When I have new students I always introduce this place as my second home,” she says. “Then I tell them, ‘Now it’s your second home too.’”

Her pride in the students is obvious in the collection of their work that hangs on the walls. She knows the story of each artist intimately - a prosecutor, a Marine, an engineer, and a friend undergoing chemotherapy, among others.

“I love when my students see they can achieve something they never thought they could,” she says. “Some artists feel that expressing themselves is all they can do, but for me the satisfaction of teaching sometimes overcomes the need to paint for myself.”

In total, Irina teaches 15 classes including five for children and 10 for adults. The classes are a judgment-free zone where students of all ages can express their creativity in a friendly, diverse environment. However, at one time she couldn’t imagine teaching anyone in English. When she emigrated to Dallas, Texas, from Moscow in 1993, she only knew one English sentence: “Hi, my name is Irina.”



Irina and Jacob Smulevitch



Thanks to her master of fine arts degree in fashion from the prestigious Moscow Textile Academy, she entered the American workforce with an artistic background. “It helped me in the beginning, when I was basically speechless, to come back to fine art and express myself in colors,” she says.

Her work led her from Dallas to New York to Frederick, Maryland. Along the way she mastered English through intense practice that included classes and a lot of classic literature, which she thoroughly enjoys. She also had a son, Jacob, with whom she moved to the north side of Indianapolis in 2008.

At first her family lived in one of Carmel’s neighboring communities. Then, she visited an arts festival in downtown Carmel and fell in love. “The architecture just reminded me of Frederick,” she says. She and Jacob moved to Carmel and never looked back.

Irina taught at the Indianapolis Art Center for a decade. Although her students felt like family, she still dreamed of owning her own studio. With the encouragement and support of her students

and friends, she finally opened Carmel Art Education Studio on February 12, 2018.

“I couldn’t have done it without the support, but I also worked very, very hard for this,” she says. “This studio is my dream come true.”

On her move-in day, 32 of Irina’s students and supporters showed up to help move supplies and build desks. They ordered pizza from Greek’s and coffee from Zing! Cafe. Neighbors stopped by to introduce themselves and learn her story.

That story inspires many including Jacob, who inherited her incredible drive and passion for teaching. At just 25 years old, he is the head coach for the Charlotte Rush Premier Hockey League team in Charlotte, North Carolina. He calls his mom before and after every game he coaches. “My mom has supported me in every step of my career,” he says. “When I think about all she’s faced and the people she’s impacted, it makes it easy to push through the tough days.”





From day one, The Village of WestClay has been a blessing to Irina. “Seeing the way they’ve embraced her, it’s everything I’ve known she’s always deserved,” Jacob says.

The tight-knit WestClay community is kind to small businesses, since “everybody really knows each other,” Irina explains. “It’s so nice when you’re walking on the street and people greet you by name.”

During COVID-19 lockdowns, her students stopped by during their normal class times and waved through the windows of her studio. To support her when classes were impossible, the WestClay president posted a message stating that residents could hire her to draw and paint pictures of their homes. In response, people lined up outside to commission her work. “That support is what helped me keep my school alive,” she says.

Now, her neighbors are rallying around her again. Irina was born in Odessa, Ukraine, and still has family in the area.

“The support for my motherland from the community has been overwhelming,” she says. In her window hang Ukrainian and American flags printed for her by her neighbor, who owns The Village Barber.

“It’s a small gesture but it means so much,” she adds.

Carmel Art Education Studio is located at 12749 Meeting House Road, Suite 120 in Carmel. Visit carmelartedstudio.com for the full schedule of art classes, or call 301-693 3827.

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