



Contributed / Ryan Rodgers

Jan Rivard Attridge, 87, stands in the doorway of her Grand Marais home.

Portraits of her neighbors

Grand Marais artist captures likenesses in 'Matriarchs'

GRAND MARAIS

Jan Rivard Attridge started painting the people around her when she was a teenager.

"I just painted everybody," Attridge said last week at her home in Grand Marais. "The guys that had the stores on

Main Street, my mom's best friend. Whoever wanted me to paint, I painted."

This began in the southwestern Minnesota prairie town of Marshall in the late 1950s. More than 60 years later, Attridge is still painting her neighbors. Her latest

portrait series, "Matriarchs," features 10 Grand Marais women.

Attridge moved alone to Grand Marais nearly 20 years ago.

"Because I was a stranger and a woman, I was very conscious of how I was treated," she said, recalling when she

arrived in 2007. "I was going into different places in town, and they were run by women. Each one had her act together."

She remembered wandering into the Java Moose Espresso Cafe and finding an "accepting and

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classy little place," where she was welcomed by owner Ann Jorgenson.

"Jan did such an extraordinary thing," Jorgenson said recently on a WTIP radio program about Attridge's "Matriarchs" series. "She captured who I feel is me."

The series is a reflection on the women who had first welcomed her, and how those women were the stitching that held the lakeside town together.

"There are these elders that are so loved and trusted," Attridge said. "Now that I've been here a long time, I wanted to honor them."

The other women in Attridge's "Matriarchs" series include Lois Eynik, Sherrie Lindskog of World's Best Donuts, artist Betsy Bowen, Sue Hennessey of the Grand Marais Playhouse, WTIP's Deb Benedict, avid volunteer Jan Smith, local arts booster Joan Farnham, and restaurateurs and housing advocates Anna and Sarah Hamilton.

Prior to moving to Grand Marais, Attridge was living in the Twin Cities and experiencing a low period. She recalled on the WTIP program, "I had no place to go, and I had no money, and I was exhausted."

Friends came to the rescue.

"They came down and cleared my apartment out and drove me up. They had the A-frame in Finland, not in use during winter," she said. "They said, 'Just go there.' My life was just like, whatever's going to happen."

Attridge has been on the North Shore ever since. She moved into her friends' A-frame cabin in Finland just in time for the 2006 Cavity Lake Fire, which burned more than 30,000 acres in the Superior National Forest.

Attridge painted a series of two-by-three-foot works portraying billowing smoke and orange flames. She soon relocated to Grand Marais and resumed painting neighbors.

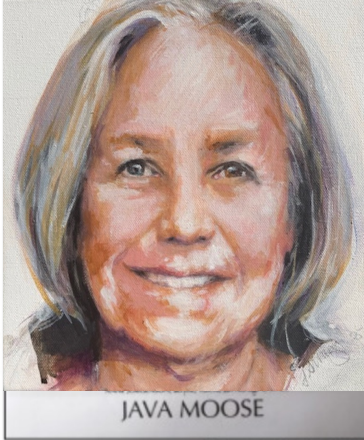
"I would have liked to have been a landscape painter, but it's just not in my psyche," she said. "I paint one-on-one. I look at the being and become one with it. I'm more interested in the dialogue that happens between two entities. I think every good artist, if they work like me, has to live alone."

Now 87 years old, Attridge is the caretaker of a weathered wooden house in the forest north of town that is owned by the family of her former art teacher, Joe Lucca. The walls of her home still bear the art of Lucca and his students, and a rack in Attridge's studio holds Lucca's old fishing rods.

Lucca was among the Twin Cities artists who found their way north after Byron Bradley and Birney Quick established the Grand Marais Art Colony in the 1950s.

Attridge has made her living from painting since the 1960s, though now "Social Security covers the basic stuff. I'm really

GRAND MARAIS MATRIARCH



JAVA MOOSE

Contributed / Ryan Rodgers

Anne Jorgenson, of the Java Moose Espresso Cafe in Grand Marais, is one of 10 women featured in painter Jan Attridge's "Matriarchs" series.

GRAND MARAIS MATRIARCH



BETSY BOWEN GALLERY

Contributed / Ryan Rodgers

Betsy Bowen, of Betsy Bowen Gallery in Grand Marais, is one of 10 women featured in painter Jan Attridge's "Matriarchs" series.

good. I didn't need to do shows because everything I did flew off the wall."

She credits her skill to classical training in Europe. "People need to have something exactly like what their product is. And I can do that because I took time in my early years to learn how to really draw something accurately, using basic proportion lines — the eye line to the bottom of nose, bottom of lips, chin line, bottom of the ears."

Before studying painting in France and Holland, she arrived in the Twin Cities to fanfare. In January 1969, 20-year-old Attridge, then-Rivard, had literally arrived in town that day when a columnist with the Minneapolis Tribune chronicled her entrance by concluding an article, "so that's how Jan Rivard enrolled in school, found a room, got a job, worked her first advertising picture, and got a date for Monday night, too!"

The article described Attridge as "strikingly pretty." Another article followed in the rival Minneapolis Star, finding her wearing an orange leotard and leather skirt while working as a fashion photographer to pay her way through art school. Her boss, a photographer

named Merie Morris, told the reporter, "She shames the guys into working harder."

Attridge married sculptor and fellow art student Tom Attridge. The couple opened a studio in Minneapolis and had a son.

At age 24, Jan Attridge produced a solo show of portraits of pregnant women, followed by solo exhibitions at the prestigious Walker Art Center and the Kilbride-Bradley Gallery, which was owned by Byron Bradley, who had founded the Grand Marais Art Colony.

With artist friends and her husband and son, she visited Joe Lucca and stayed in the bunkhouse of the house she lives in now.

"Everyone drank a lot in those days," Attridge reminisced.

At home in the Twin Cities, Attridge began painting theatrical scenery for the Guthrie Theater, the Minnesota Opera, and the Children's Theater, a type of work she would continue through the 1980s. She opened a storefront gallery in Dinkytown, the countercultural nexus next to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where not so long before Bob Dylan had rented a room.

GRAND MARAIS MATRIARCH



SHERRIE LINDSKOG, acrylic, 10X10, Jan Attridge © 6.5.25

WORLD'S BEST DONUTS

Contributed / Ryan Rodgers

Sherrie Lindskog, of World's Best Donuts in Grand Marais, is one of 10 women featured in painter Jan Attridge's "Matriarchs" series.



Contributed / Ryan Rodgers

Jan Attridge painted this portrait of Harley Toffey and his dog, Cisco, in 2016. Attridge often is inspired by her neighbors.

In 1968, also in Minneapolis, Dennis Banks and Clyde Bellecourt founded AIM — the American Indian Movement — to revitalize Indigenous rights and culture. AIM opened Heart of the Earth Survival School for Native children in Dinkytown, near Attridge's storefront.

Attridge was busy; during the '60s, she painted 150 commissions. Yet she was unfulfilled by the type of work she was doing. "I was worn down to a nub," Attridge told a journalist at the time. "I was simply reflecting pleasant images because it had become my income."

As she became friends with her new neighbors, however, she began painting AIM members. "I gave

my time to them because I honored what they were doing."

Attridge painted Banks and Bellecourt, as well as Bill and Russell Means, Leonard Peltier, and John Trudell. In 1980, she traveled to the Black Hills International Survival Gathering, an assembly of Native American, anti-nuclear and pro-farming activists.

Just months before, John Trudell's wife and children had been killed in a suspicious fire. At the gathering, he gave a passionate speech that still moved Attridge 45 years later.

"The bravery and the commitment of folks like that when they were under attack was

phenomenal to me," Attridge reflected.

Today, pushing 90 years old, Attridge no longer paints every day.

"I'm always gridding something up," she said, referring to the Old Masters' technique she'd learned a lifetime ago in Europe. "But it isn't painting for eight hours like I used to. I like the people and things I choose to paint. I like their energy and want it to be as beautiful as I can make it."

She said her first portrait in Grand Marais was of Milt Powell, who had married Attridge's friend from art school — Alice Semrud, whom she painted, too. She painted Yvonne Mills, the woman who stacked cords of firewood for Attridge's woodstove, and her artist friend Leni Erickson.

Attridge quickly bonded with musher and former state representative Frank Moe over Moe's environmental activism, and Attridge made two portraits of him before Moe's untimely death in 2022.

There were so many — the local druggist Bob Sample, veteran fisherman Harley Toffey with his dog Cisco, and welder Marty Jackopich, who posed with two tiny dogs.

"These tough guys and their little dogs!" Attridge exclaimed in delight. Just the other day she said, she'd had to call a plumber. After the plumber did the work and learned Jan's story, he not only refused to charge her, but he also sent her pictures of his golden retriever and insisted that he would pay for his portrait.

On Attridge's easel sat a photo of the retriever and a new canvas, blank but for a neat grid done in pencil, ready for the artist to pick up her brush.