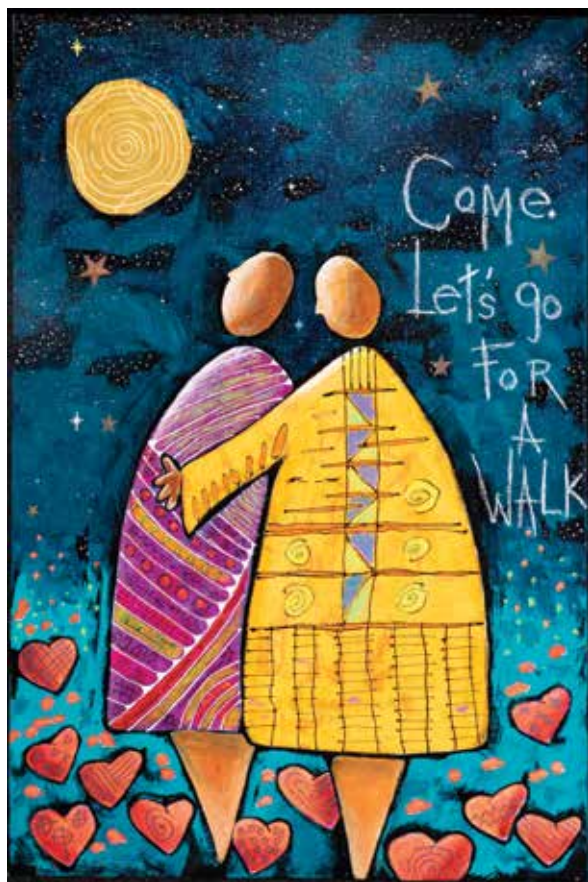


She Flavored Her Illustration Career With Salty Enlightenment



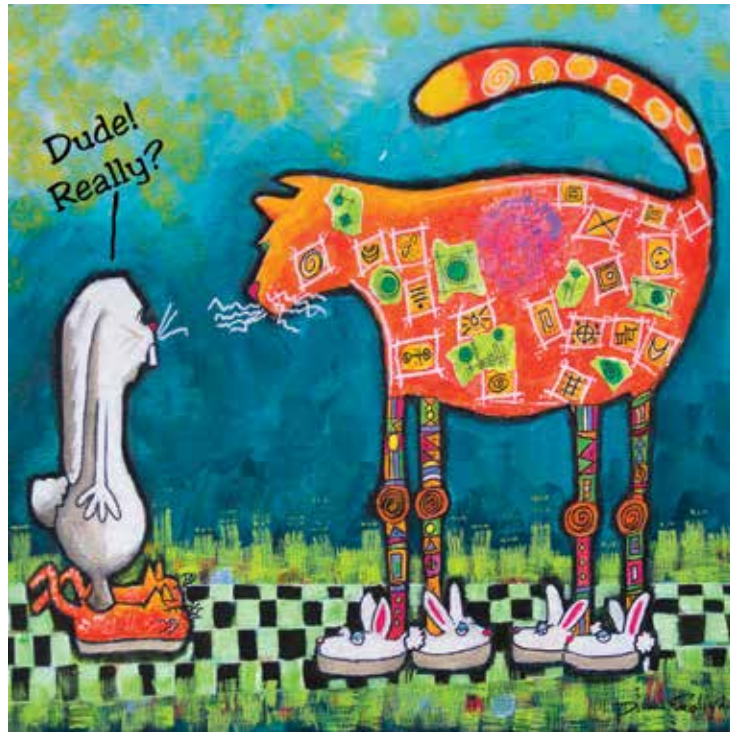
Let's go for a walk

By Paul M. Howey
Portrait by Matt Rose

Surveying the human condition, Diane English remarks, "We're not the brightest crayons in the box." But that's not so bad: After all, English has made a career out of illustrating our foibles. The deliciously irreverent entrepreneur — founder and sole proprietor of The Great Cosmic Happy Ass Card Company — embraces these descriptors, and credits her sunny attitude to her "family of smartasses."



Diane English's signature style — quirky with a New Age tint — was a perfect fit for Asheville.



In addition to cards, English's product line includes funny and inspirational magnets, coffee mugs, T-shirts, playing cards, prints and more. The illustrator says her Irish kin gave her a salty sense of humor.

Her Irish kin "always had something to laugh about," recalls English. "A lot of my ideas come directly from my mom and from my aunt, who was hysterically funny."

In addition to cards, English's product line includes funny and inspirational magnets, coffee mugs, T-shirts, playing cards, storyboard totems, prints, coloring books, and a new book titled *Notes to Myself: The Art and Dangerous Thoughts of the Great Cosmic Happy Ass*.

Growing up in Philadelphia, English says she was fascinated with animation. "I really wanted to become a cel colorist [the traditional 2D method] for Warner [Bros.] or Disney. Alas, it was not meant to be, but my love of color and humor continued."

Her eclectic résumé includes stints selling shoes, working as a graphic designer, teaching country-music artists how to give TV interviews, and owning a metaphysical bookstore for 14 years in St. Augustine, Florida. "I had a great run with the bookstore. It was during that time I began doing the notecards and magnets. Big hit!"

When a major bookstore chain moved in, her business began to dry up, but by then English had something to fall back on. And in 1996, she started a card company. "Why not?" she asks rhetorically. "What's the worst that could happen?"

Here's what did happen: Four years later, she moved to Asheville, where she soon got a call from an international gift distributor who was interested in selling her cards. "Who was I to argue?" she quips.

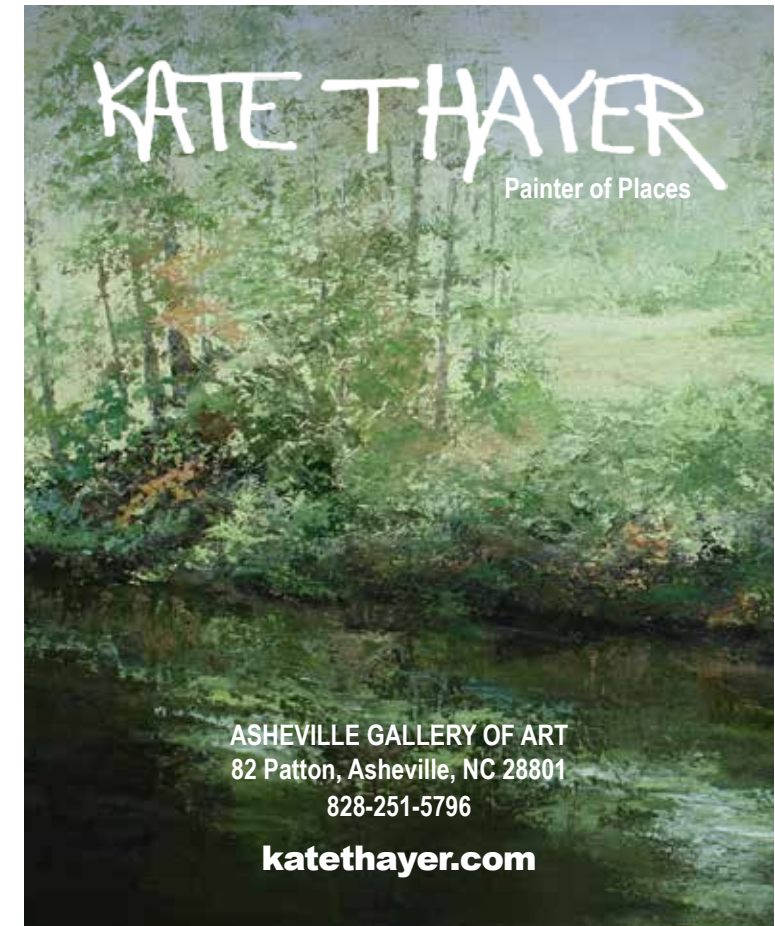
"When the cards and magnets started taking off, I was thrilled," English continues. "One afternoon, with a line of customers at the counter, we were all chatting about the cards when someone popped up and said, 'Why not name it The Great Cosmic Happy Ass Card Company?' Shazam! That was it!"

Some people have entered her studio/shop in the River Arts District, noticed the name of her company or a particularly sassy card, and huffed away, reveals English. But the self-taught artist says, "I've developed a wonderful capacity of ignoring religiously prudish people who want me to change what I do to please them." She lets her artwork do the talking for her, as in the card titled "Conversations with God." A guy drinking beer with the Creator remarks: "I thought you'd be taller."

An official interview seems like an ideal opportunity to ask the quintessential question of this creative oracle. So, with all she's learned, what has she found to be the true meaning of life?

After an appropriate moment of reflection, English replies: "I forgot to write it down."

The Great Cosmic Happy Ass Card Company (greatcosmichappyass.com) is located at 375 Depot St. in the River Arts District. Diane English's work can also be found at *Mountain Made Art Gallery* in Grove Arcade (1 Page Ave. #123, Asheville, mtnmade.com) and at *Seven Sisters Gallery* (117 Cherry St., Black Mountain, sevensistersgallery.com).



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