



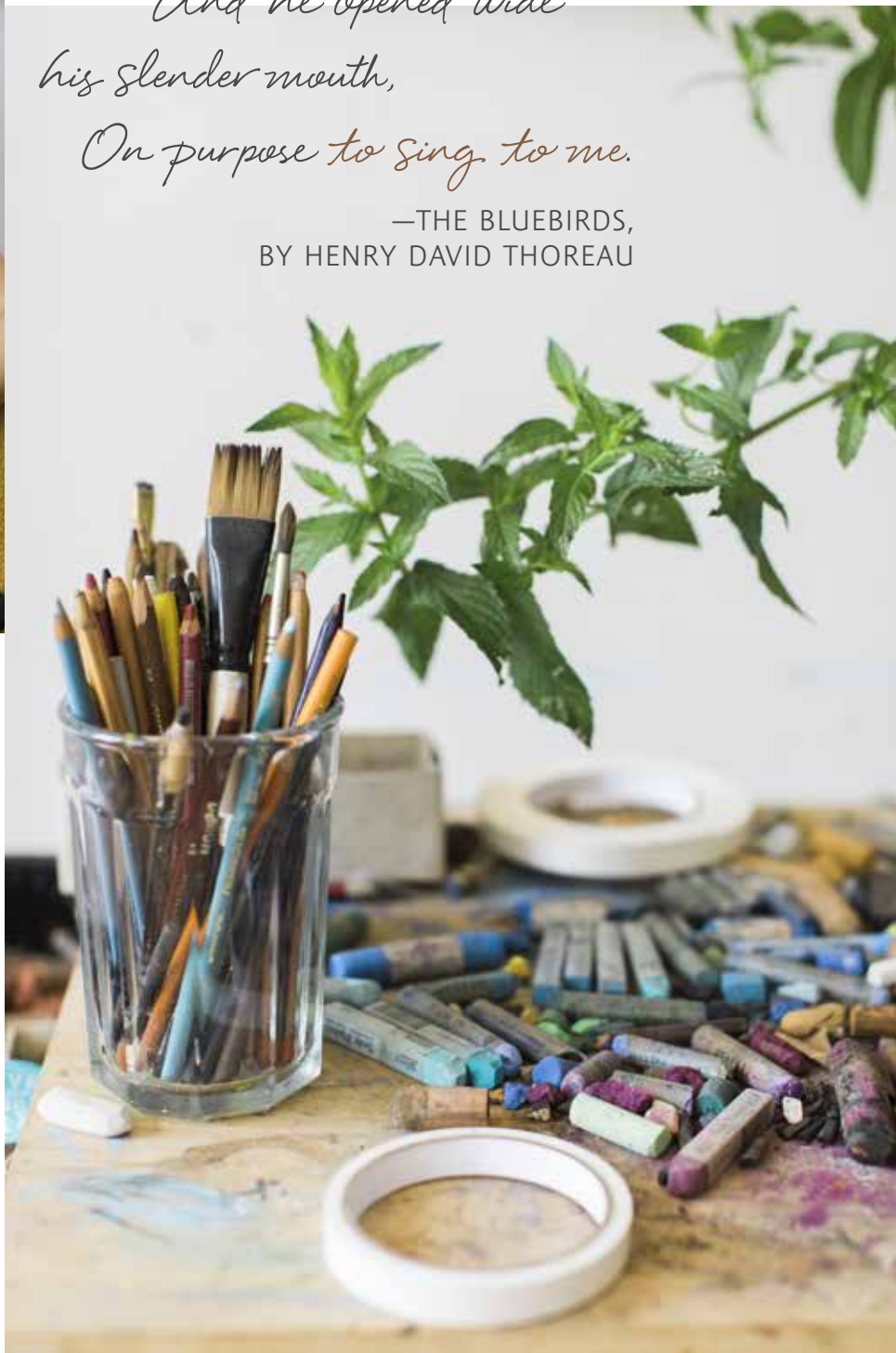
Holly Wach

Photography by
Molly Slater



*...The bluebird had come
from the distant South
To his box in
the poplar tree,
And he opened wide
his slender mouth,
On purpose to sing to me.*

—THE BLUEBIRDS,
BY HENRY DAVID THOREAU



I. INTRO

The studio was always a place of possibility. I've had many studios over the years, but I only found the perfect place once I committed 100% to becoming a full-time artist. Only then did I find my audience and muse.



II. BEGINNINGS

When I was eight, my mother changed up our family life and decided to go back to school and pursue her dream to be a full-time artist. Suddenly, our house became her studio, filled with artwork, art books, exciting materials, and assignments. My elementary-aged mind was overwhelmed with the stories and the world of her art teachers. I saw first-hand what commitment to one's craft could produce. I suddenly had access to color mixing, fancy papers, and exotic brushes. I would follow along with my mom's lesson or be given my own advanced project. Like a spiritual awakening, making art gave me energy, it focused me, and it opened my heart. Finally, I had a way to communicate my love of the beautiful creatures of the world. It became my poetry. I had found my calling.

HOLLY WACH is a Providence, RI artist known for her spirited joyful paintings of birds. She lives with her longtime partner, their daughter and new dog. She's dedicated a life to developing her craft and observing first-hand the creatures of nature that inspire her work. Holly has built a thriving art business in RI. Her birds have found homes around the globe. You can find her work through her website, at art shows, at boutique shops and galleries, or in her studio where you can meet Holly and see her latest paintings. In a world teeming with distractions, Holly's art helps you slow down so you can have your own dialogue with nature.

III. MY JOURNEY

At 18, I was off to see the world. For the next 15 years, my life was travel, art school, and working many jobs to support these passions. Walking the roads of the Inca and Romans, staring at the frescoes of Florence, floating down the rivers of the Ecuadorian Rainforest, and climbing to the peaks of the Rockies ignited endless stories to paint. With each experience, my love for the earth and its curious creatures grew.

But traveling alone was not going to allow me to make the work I had dreamed of making. My art professors and my mom were all telling me I needed to be in New York City. So, once again, I was off.

In my 10 years in the city, I earned a masters from the New York Academy of Art, studied at the New York Studio School and Art Students League, and spent hours sketching in the Drawing Room at the dynamic and dense Metropolitan Museum of Art. Surrounded by talent, knowledge, and ambition, my abilities and confidence as an artist grew.

But as renowned as these schools were, the one thing that was never discussed or taught was how to be a full-time artist. There was one track: go to the right school, build a portfolio, apply to galleries, and teach, followed by “it’s hard” and “make sure you have a safety job to support yourself.”



IV. TURNING POINT

Six years ago, when I moved our family from northern California to Providence, Rhode Island, the studio, once only holding the promise of a dream, quickly became an incubator where a lifetime of making art ignited with an all-in commitment to birth my art business.

Until now, the art studio had only been a place to escape--acting as a life support to my soul's ambition. I didn't realize at the time that art teaching, managerial, and bartending jobs were teaching me how to communicate, share knowledge, and run a business. I was still preparing to create the art I dreamt of making, supporting myself with those jobs.

I was 42 at the time. Two of my close friends had just lost their husbands to cancer and heart disease and a dear friend almost lost her life. These women were the same age as I, and that year of profound sadness made life very prescient. I thought, "If not now, then when?"

I googled, "artists making a living at art." I ignored the naysayers. Like my mom, I started turning the house into my studio. I committed to painting every day. I discovered Instagram and used it as an opportunity to show up each day with something new to share. I researched and followed artists who were taking their careers into their own hands, outside of the gallery circuit.

Nine months in, I discovered my muse: the birds. Fascinating, feathered creatures fed outside my studio window on our fruiting mulberry tree. I had no idea what amazing teachers, dedicated parents, and colorful personalities they were. I saw fledgling blue jay siblings teasing each other while the parents showed them new places to find food. Robins and Orioles followed. I realized there was something more to these birds. Songs were a form of communication—soon that was all I was painting.

At that time, I had been playing a bit with watercolor and the medium really captured the movement of the birds. But I had always hated watercolor. So at first, mine were stiff. The next month I was visiting my parents and asked my mom for a lesson in watercolor. She showed me a wet-on-wet process that let the water and paint run free.

My work was getting stronger and starting to sell consistently online and out of our home. This built my confidence.





V. THE BUSINESS OF ART

My partner asked me to come with him to a “business and banking” event. Someone asked, “What kind of profit do you need to qualify for a business loan?” The speaker, a local business banker, answered, “Just \$100.” All of a sudden it hit me—I *already have an art business.*

I reached out to a local, non-profit women’s business and enterprise group and they paired me with a mentor. We met regularly for 3 months where he walked me through the foreign land of business plans and profit-and-loss statements. I was a sponge. I realized business and marketing are an art form in and of themselves. I realized that all I needed was a vision with solid direction and I could launch my art career.

Soon after, I went to a friend’s open studio in one of the old nearby mills. I instantly saw the art business model laid out in space. Not just a place to make art, I needed space for framing, packaging, and showing the work. Now 18 months from the decision to go all-in on my art, my studio moved out of the bedroom and into a giant loft with room for the birds to soar.

VI. THE POWER OF THE STUDIO

Magic happens near the wall of north-facing windows in front of my industrial-loft studio space. Diffused light flows in all day, bouncing off 15-foot-high white walls. Perfect light for a nature artist has clarity and evenness that reveals details and nuances in the subject matter. Walking into great light every day gives me energy, inspiring me to work from the moment the door opens.

My studio begins on the left wall where I explore the juicy, thick texture of oil paint. The sculptural expressive marks and brilliant colors of oil gives birds and botanicals a statuesque presence and timeless form. Mixing the brilliant colors of the birds is my greatest challenge and when I get it right, the birds come alive.

The center of my painting universe right now is my watercolor table. Working on several pieces at a time, I paint, then pause, then reflect, hanging them on the wall to get to know them. I listen for what they need as they come to life.

Watercolor releases the free spirit of birds. It feels like a dance with color and water. Each piece starts with the same wet-on-wet process my mother taught me. Paint is dropped and moved around until the gesture and shape are established. Once the first layer dries, I add another, drawing parts of the bird with just water, then folding in color, dancing, and manipulating the paint until it finds its place on the bird. With smaller brushes and finishing details, the personality of the bird finally emerges and greets you.

I'm at my freest when I'm drawing big pastels on the wall. A grand, empty wall gives me space to portray majestic birds of prey. The pastel medium forces decisive mark-making, capturing its strength and intense focus. I understand when patrons say they can feel the presence of my oversized owls. They feel intense eyes looking through them. They feel the soaring power of the wings. They are stopped in their tracks by the presence of a larger-than-life predator. It's the size of the studio that allows me to draw as large as I can dream.





A studio needs quiet space, too. In the empty spaces of the old hardwood floors, I create my nests of inspiration. Art books, reference photos, paints, pencils, and large swaths of blank paper surround me with potential as I develop ideas and sketches that will tell a new story. With my dog Nina by my side, in my comfy chair, I open Winslow Homer to see what is possible with watercolor, or John Singer Sargent to remind me to loosen up, or Paula Rega to be bold and expressive.





The gallery area is where clients come to see my work in person. They can explore the full collection of my work and learn how it is made. Sharing my process with collectors always brings us both insight and joy. They're able to choose work and design their own collections then put them up on my walls to find their perfect birds.

What I love the most is hearing the stories of what the birds mean to my collectors—cardinals that came to their yards to comfort after the loss of a loved one, owls that have guided lost patrons out of the woods, hummingbirds that return each year demanding their feeders be filled.

The back section of my 1000-sq-ft. space is the engine of the business where work is prepared for shows, homes, and shops. My assistants and I prepare packages with color and joy, complete with ribbons and bows, special notes, and careful finishing touches. Making art is a dream but bringing it to people is both a business and a blessing. I want every package that a buyer receives from me to make them smile with delight like they're getting a gift in the mail.



This reminds me that nothing great happens alone. To support my art business, I created this idea of a "mastermind/failure club" a group of fellow professional, independent, creative women who could support their creative careers together. In the four years that I've regularly met with these powerhouse photographers, designers, and dedicated artists, my studio has provided the perfect meeting place to share our ideas and dreams. Fellow founder, Michelle Meek, said it best., "We are advocates, advisors, supporters, and champions. I'm so glad that when I hit a wall now, I am uplifted simply by thinking what all these wonderful humans would say to me."

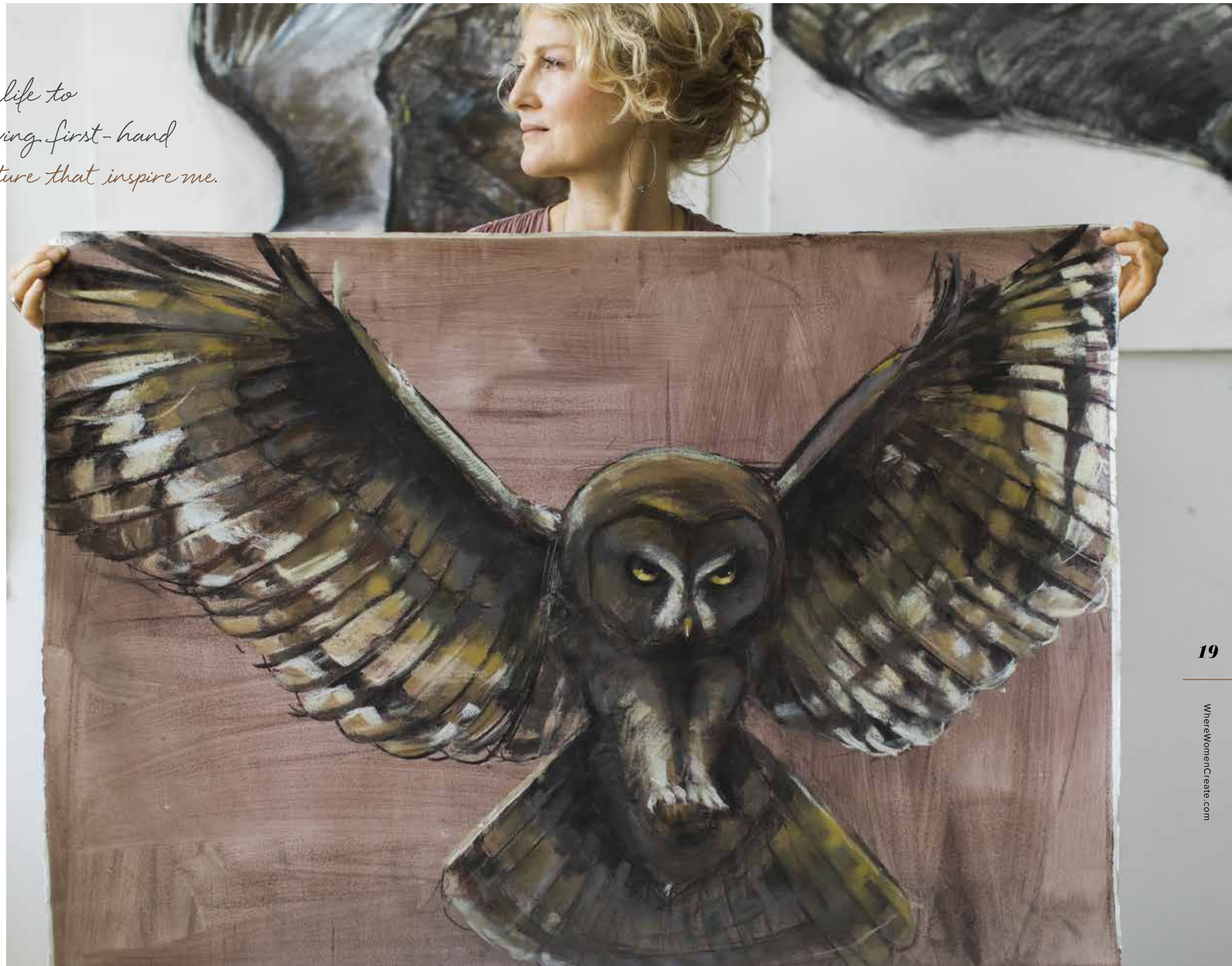
*I've dedicated my life to
developing my craft and observing first-hand
the creatures of nature that inspire me.*

VII. FUTURE DREAMS

My dream has always been to share the magic of curiosity and discovery of the flora and fauna around us; to bring joy and connection to these creatures of nature through art.

I've had many studios over the years, but the right space didn't come along until I was ready for it. Possibilities didn't open up to me until I believed in what I had to offer and committed to it every day. I've found that having a multi-functional space that greets you every day is essential to fueling my dream of thriving as an artist.

i **More on Holly**
www.HollyWach.com
Instagram: HollyWach
Facebook: HollyWachArtist
Pinterest: Holly Wach – Artist





MOLLY SLATER is a New England-based photographer working with brands, creatives, and couples that appreciate the art of photography. Through natural light and genuine connection, she aims to capture every subject's authentic essence. At the end of the day, whether it's an artist with their brush, a mother with her child or a couple getting married, she believes that showcasing that connection is what makes for the most powerful photograph. Molly lives with her husband and three daughters on a historic six-acre farm in South Kingstown, RI. When she's not behind the lens, you can find her tending to her many chickens and gardens or baking something sweet or savory with her daughters in the kitchen.

More on Molly
i www.MollyLoPhotography.com
Instagram: MollyLoPhotography