

# Artist Forrest Solis on Surviving Her First Summer in Phoenix

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100 Creatives continues with Phoenix artist Forrest Solis.

*Every other year, New Times puts the spotlight on Phoenix's creative forces — painters, dancers, designers, and actors. Leading up to the release of Best of Phoenix, we're taking a closer look at 100 more. Welcome to the 2016 edition of 100 Creatives. Up today is [56. Forrest Solis.](#)*

Forrest Solis' commitment to art started early. She attended Chicago Academy for the Arts for high school, commuting from a northwest suburb outside the city and spending three hours of each day devoted solely to arts education.

"Often, it was dark when I left for school and when I returned home," Solis, now 37, says. "The level of commitment this schedule demanded of me helped to firmly establish my future dedication to the arts."

That youthful dedication has brought the painter, who resides in Phoenix, to look deeply into her own experiences and those of others as a foundation for her work. Solis focuses on adult-child relationships and gender normativity.

"Issues of the home, violence against women, and childhood trauma have been central since I began painting at a young

age," Solis says. "The brutality perpetrated, the feeling of powerlessness, and the resulting psychological effects have shaped the substance of my artwork and drive my desire to paint. I have never considered my work commercial, which has allowed me to explore some challenging topics."

In May 2015, Solis founded [Creative Push](#), a multi-media art and oral history project that gathers and presents birth experiences through both visual arts and storytelling. "We record women's birth stories, connect those stories with artists who make original works of art in response," she says.

More recently, through her series "L+D," Solis has taken on the challenging topic of birth trauma through a Hitchcockian horror lens. The aim here is "laying bare the gore, pain, and violence involved in bringing new life into the world."



A look at Solis' take on *Sleepers* in progress.

Currently, she's completing a large-scale and modernized reproduction of Gustave Courbet's *Sleepers*, which depicts two nude women entwined on a bed. "The painting depicts [Julia Friedman](#), art historian and Courbet scholar, and myself intertwined in bed, an allegory of sorts, the painting represents art and art history in bed together and the complicated relationship between the two," Solis says, adding that the work will be on display in September as a

solo exhibition at the [Jamie Brooks Fine Art](#) in Costa Mesa, California.

Solis' work sheds light on stories that often go unheard. And she refuses to compromise. "My greatest accomplishment is staying true to my unique artistic vision," she says. "I am proud to say that my work is an uncompromisingly honest interpretation of how I experience the world."

**I came to Phoenix with** a sense of belonging, which is weird because I was a total outsider. I am from Chicago and was utterly isolated from all of my friends and family, but I feel strongly that this is where I am meant to be.

I will never forget how that first summer things just fell into place. After tirelessly searching for a rental, I bumped into a nice gentleman at Carly's on Roosevelt who had an adorable adobe house for rent. That person happened to be Robert Sentinery, owner and publisher of *JAVA* magazine. Once I moved into my new home, the loneliness set in, and that is when I decided to meet my neighbors. I put together bundles of flowers and started knocking on doors and introducing myself. The first door I knocked on was my next-door neighbor Jen, who was on her way to a gathering of some of the ladies in the neighborhood. That is when I discovered that my neighbors were incredibly smart and cool and included local artist Linda Ingraham, who took me under her wing. And so it went from there...

**I make art because** I want to and because I need to in order to stay a sane and happy person. Art making is not a logical venture. Artists almost never get a positive return on the investment of their time, skills, energy, or the money they put into making their art. What I do get in return is a sense of purpose. I believe deeply in the importance of art and culture in the world. I can imagine a world without many

things, including electricity, the Internet, or men (just kidding), but never without art.

**I'm most productive when** I follow a schedule. I am not an emotional painter; I don't wait for inspiration or for a particular mood. I set goals on a timeline and I know what I am going to accomplish when I enter into the studio. When I was younger, I rigidly spent a certain amount of hours in the studio each day, but now that I am a mom I have learned to be more flexible and set longer goals: I will finish X in a week or a month.

**My inspiration wall is full of** objects, so I guess it is more like an inspiration shelf. I collect quirky objects with what I consider "personality". I love objects from nature, including insects, nests, bones, rocks, and minerals. Unfortunately for my husband and child, I also love weird stuffed animals and dolls. I recently had to box up some particularly creepy baby dolls I used in my L+D painting series because my 4-year-old son was too scared to be anywhere near my studio.

**I've learned most from** doing, from taking risks and overcoming challenges. I am shocked by my capacity to still learn and grow as a person and an artist, and I hope to never stop.

**Good work should** transcend the medium. I want to ask, "How did they do that?"

**The Phoenix creative scene could use** a stronger network among artists who are mothers. When I had my son, I went through an identity crisis. My artwork, interests, and accomplishments no longer defined me; I was a mom. I would have benefited from a network of women who have had similar anxieties and overcome them. Sadly, there is a stigma to making artwork about motherhood and acknowledging how uncool it can feel to be a mom.