Heather Wilcoxon is a Bay Area Painter who received her MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1988. She has exhibited in New York, Houston, Denver, Seattle, Miami, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Her work is in many collections such as: Fine Art Museums in San Francisco, Triton Art Museum, the De Saisset Museum in Santa Clara, California and the di Rosa Collection in Napa, California. She has received several awards from the Pollock /Krasner Foundation in New York, 1998–2007, as well as three painting grants from the Buck Foundation, Marin Arts Council, in Marin County, California. She has also received residency fellowships at the Djerassi Artist Residency program in Woodside, California in 1998 and at the StoneHouse Artists Programs in Miramonte, California in 2003. She is currently represented by Jack Fischer Gallery in San Francisco, California, and Brenda Taylor Gallery in New York. For more information please visit her website at heatherwilcoxon.com
These 36 drawings are about my reaction to the Gulf oil spill that happened May–August, 2010. This was the largest oil spill in the history of this country.

As an artist who has lived most of my life on the water, I am extremely familiar with the rich and sensitive aquatic habitat that surrounds me. I understand the vulnerability and fragileness of water-borne animals and fish. I have become an environmentalist within my own community by saving a small marsh area right outside my houseboat.

At first, when I heard how much oil was spilling into the Gulf last year, I felt helpless and frustrated. Then the anger came, and I knew as an artist I needed to create a visual statement. When I started this series I wasn't sure what I was doing until the third drawing, when it hit me—these images are about the oil spill. Much of my work has to go through this process before I realize the content.

Once I established my direction, I had to find images of the devastation. What I found was shocking and painful to look at. Hundreds of images of dead and oiled birds as well as burned turtles. These images filtered into my work. Every day, I would draw several new images until I was drained of emotion. I felt that this was the most difficult work I had ever done. My studio walls became full of these dark and foreboding drawings. However, I also felt that this work was necessary and some of the most important I had ever done.

This experience made me realize that we are all part of the problem. Human consumption is killing our planet. Most of us drive cars. And we love them. Plastic is another petroleum-based product that is part of this story. It kills hundreds of birds each year. I personally have found many dead birds killed by plastic fish line, bags, and drink containers. The list goes on. We all must take responsibility for the future of our oceans, rivers, and wetlands. Our fragile little planet depends on it. Hopefully these drawings can help make a difference in some way.

Heather Wilcoxon

Within the last 10 years, my work has developed a colorful cast of characters that comment on our concerns, fears, worries as well as our brutality towards one another. I view the world as a dangerous place. However, I am seasoned enough to see the absurdity of it all. My cartoon figures capture both comedy and the tragedy of humanity in my childlike iconography. These characters embody a sense of innocent playfulness. Yet, in their monstrous rendering, a dark humor is reflected. The pleasing colors, pretty surfaces, and childlike imagery lure the viewer into a disjointed narrative that quickly turns ugly, mean and nasty.