

Cammy Davis Mixed-Media Artist Extraordinaire

By Maralyn D. Hill



Cammy Davis came to my attention as a result of my being a guest on her show, "Art on the Airwaves." As you read Cammy's interview, you will see that in addition to being a well-respected mixed-media artist who is inspired by nature, she has developed two other skills necessary for success: a good business plan for herself and a path that helps others in her field achieve success. I've found that individuals who bring that combination together do quite well.

She exhibits her work in solo and group exhibitions in galleries throughout Oregon and has her "artistic maps" published in books and periodicals. Cammy is the creator of "Edgy in October," has a line of jewelry based on her paintings and is the host of "Art on the Airwaves."

Davis is busy and resourceful. She received a Haines Foundation Grant, CLIPS Award and Trailblazer Award, and is a founding member and on the steering committee for the Arts Alliance of Southern Oregon.

Cammy studied Fine Art at the University of Idaho, raised a family and then went back to complete her degree in Interior Design at Bellevue College in Washington.

Maralyn: What medium(s) do you work in and how did you decide to work in that space?

Cammy: I am a mixed media artist and I work with everything from metal, concrete, wallpaper, textiles, plaster, sand, fiber paste and collage. Occasionally, I purchase mediums from the art supply store, but typically, I create them myself. I find that the experimentation lends to my creativity. I grew up simply, with the mindset that if I wanted something, I needed to find a way to make it. That philosophy has carried forward into my artwork. I create the entire piece, including building the panels myself. It just doesn't feel like something I've created unless I made the entire piece, from nothing to something inspiring.

Maralyn: Is there a specific artist, person or place that inspires you or your work?

Cammy: I am the most inspired by Nature. When I was in 2nd grade, my parents sold their motorcycle shop and adobe house in San Luis Obispo, California, and decided to be hippies

(this was the 70s). They bought an Airstream travel trailer and moved us to Washington and then Seattle to "live off the land." The saving grace was that my parents always bought beautiful pieces of land, first on Puget Sound and then later, by a small river in Oregon. I grew up in the woods and played in the river. That close connection with Nature remains my inspiration.

Maralyn: Do you have a favorite piece that you have created?

Cammy: My favorite recent piece is called Airstream Pods. A friend was doing this Isolation Pod rejuvenation treatment, and his comments about the peace he felt reminded me of growing up in the Airstream. In the dark, it was always a warm oasis. As a child, I always hated that the Airstream was my home, but as an adult, I look back and remember the





warmth of Mom picking vegetables from the garden and making us dinner after a long day at school and cross country. I remember the sounds of rain pinging on the metal shell, and I often include rain in my paintings. To me, it is an emotional warmth, which is opposite of what most people feel. To me, it's being sheltered in my family's home while

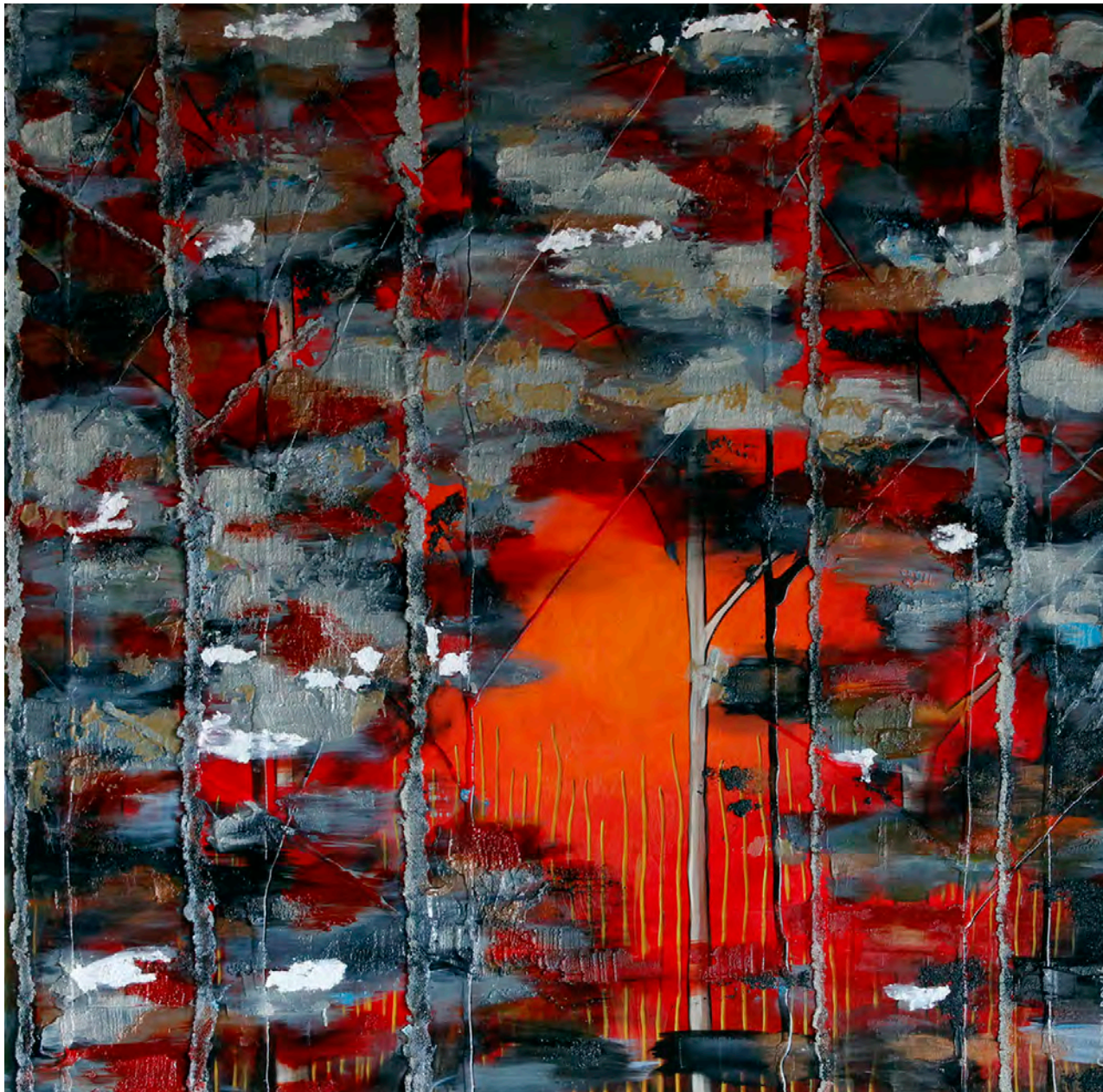
the weather is cold and wet outside.

Maralyn: Is there a specific designing experience you can tell us about, one that stands out for you, either because it transformed you as an artist or because it was just a special project?

Cammy: I didn't get my degree until five years ago. I finally was able to

return to college in my 40s and ended up majoring in Interior Design through a work-study program. Art was not an option. In my final year, our class entered an international design competition. I was a good student, but there were a few who were better at interior design. The other students were all jumping in and picking out colors and design for

the space. I couldn't grab hold of a concept until late into the semester, but when I finally did, I could see the reaction of students, teachers and design professionals. Still, I expected that this other student would possibly place in the competition. It was actually a long shot that any of us would, since it was an international competition. Instead, I



was the one who did. I got 2nd place. It was the first time anyone from our college had placed and was a huge deal. The judges told my professor that they went back and forth between the winner and myself. The question was: "Do we choose someone with a great concept, or someone with a great finished product." It was an "aha" moment, the first time I realized the power of my creative mind. I had often been told that I came up with creative solutions, even in business. This was the first time I realized how powerful that was, and I have used that creative thinking ever since. In each business decision I make for myself, I try to close my eyes and let my brain process and flow. Sometimes the solutions are amazing.

Maralyn: If you could travel anywhere in the world to see a famous piece of art, where and what would it be? Why this piece of art?

Cammy: I'm picking architecture over art, which I'm sure is surprising. The first place I would travel to is Barcelona to see Gaudi's Casa Batllo. I like the organic lines, the playfulness, the colors, mostly the textures and different objects. I feel like I'm in his head when I look at his version of art. His head must have been spinning with creative joy when he first envisioned this building. I feel that way when I am creating, everything outside of my head stops and I just give into the mind spinning, emotional waves, joy or sadness. I stop thinking about the business side of art, or the bills, or other life issues and just allow myself to feel. It is the most humbling, powerful feeling to just let go. That's what I see in his architecture.

Maralyn: What's your creative truth? Words of advice with which you would encourage other artists?

Words that you live by?

Cammy: To believe in yourself. I spent so much of my life apologizing for being an emotional person and trying to fit into society's norm. When I started accepting and at some point being proud of being sensitive and creative, my art started making sense. And people started responding. I do listen to critiques from galleries, other artists and other humans, but I also filter and use what is helpful.

Maralyn: Tell us about your work in progress.

Cammy: The piece I'm working on currently is based on a critique I got from a gallery in Portland last weekend. It's a gallery owner I trust and respect, and although most of what he said was positive, he made one comment that momentarily halted me. He said: "Your pieces feel static." Wow, I spent a day or two processing it and started some new

pieces. The first piece was horrible. I was overthinking every brushstroke, trying too hard to "be loose." I finally tossed that piece and started anew. I ignored his comment about liking my more subdued pieces and went bold. I love bold color. I also turned off the computer for that day and just allowed myself to create. I'm not sure where it's going yet, but I love it. And that is what matters to me. If I feel something from the piece, it is successful. It is bold and moves and makes me happy.

Maralyn: Were you always interested in art?

Cammy: I was always interested in art. From as far back as I can remember. I remember drawing tulips in 1st grade and Holly Hobbies a few years later. I remember sewing and making gifts for Christmas presents for my family. I remember going to my Dad's woodshop the first time I wanted a pair of high heels and trying to make them myself out of a 4" x 4" piece of wood and a strip of leather. I remember my art classes in middle school and high school, feeling like I had a home. The first time I went to college, I was planning to major in architecture; I didn't want to be a "starving artist." But I kept taking art classes, and my professors told me how much potential I had. Funny looking back, that I didn't listen and stick with it. Funny that I kept thinking I needed to do something serious to pay the bills.

Maralyn: What are your passions?

Cammy: I am the most passionate about art. I can say this because as a child, I was a natural artist. If I had continued with my passion, who knows where my life would be right now. Instead, I reigned myself in and worked at supporting my family and being a mom. Nothing I regret, but returning to art now as an adult, I feel passionate again. I feel like myself. Four years ago, when my children were grown and I had just graduated from college, I was asked to move from Seattle to small town Oregon to caretake my grandma.

This gave me the opportunity to build my art business rather than returning to office work. This also gave me the drive to do everything possible to build a self-sustaining business. I am passionate, both about art, but also the business of being an artist.

Maralyn: What is one of the hardest challenges you face as an artist?

Cammy: People tell me that what sets me apart as an artist is that I have a strong head for business as well. I think that's true. It's also the biggest challenge. It's two separate sides of your head that you have to balance and turn off and on. My wish is that I could find people to do certain things in my business that would allow me to spend more time creating. Such as, I'd love to have someone in charge of my website and social media. I'd love to have a sales rep for my jewelry. I'd love to have an engineer for my radio show. As a small business owner, you end up doing it all yourself to save on costs, but the time and energy detracts from the actual art.

Maralyn: What is one of the most rewarding elements you take away from doing what you do?

Cammy: Inspiring others. Whether it's with my art or my art business, I feel deeply rewarded when I see it helping and inspiring others. The event I created, "Edgy in October," was meant to inspire artists to push their limits. Some push them a lot, some push them a little, but I get a lot of comments of what artists are working on for "next year's Edgy," and how it pushes them to do something different than their norm. I love to hear that. With my radio show, "Art on the Airwaves," I bring

on guests who will inspire listeners with information on how they can build their art business or create new opportunities for themselves. With my art, I want it to draw people into a memory or emotional space that will inspire them to feel and to be okay with their feelings. My jewelry is meant to be an affordable piece of art that anyone can be inspired by.

Maralyn: What is one quality you feel is key in succeeding at your craft in today's creative scene?

Cammy: I think drive is the top quality for success. I take every opportunity I am given, or create for myself, and run with it as far as I can. I think there are many great artists in the world today, but to make yourself stand out from the crowd, you have to be fearless and driven. I ask for everything I want. Meaning, if I meet someone and see an opportunity, I ask. I don't allow myself to back down out of fear. I work from the time I get up in the morning until the moment I crawl into bed at night. I am very driven, because my art career is that important to me. But, whereas a lot of artists and business owners are very focused on themselves, I have found that I am happier when I am taking other artists with me. That's why creating events, videos and the radio show works well for me. I can help others build success at the same time.

Maralyn: If you could be another artist (dead or alive) for a day, who would it be? Why? How does other art inspire your work?

Cammy: I am often inspired by others' art. I go to as many galleries and art receptions as I can. I am inspired by the lines they use, the



materials, the textures, the color. I don't have a specific name, I just know that if I could find the time, I would take a day to be a sculptor. I love concrete, I use it in my mixed media pieces and I make garden art out of it occasionally. But I feel like I don't have enough time to really learn the material and create with it. The interesting thing is...now that I've written it down, I will make the time. My guess is that you will see concrete art from me in the next year or two.

Maralyn: What advice can you share with other artists about what you've learned from your journey?

Cammy: I just did a video on Overcoming Challenges for Artists and Entrepreneurs. My biggest advice from that video is to find a solution and keep moving forward. Don't let the obstacles slow down your drive. Don't halt until the situation is perfect, take the first step and keep walking. If you want something badly enough, you will find a solution.

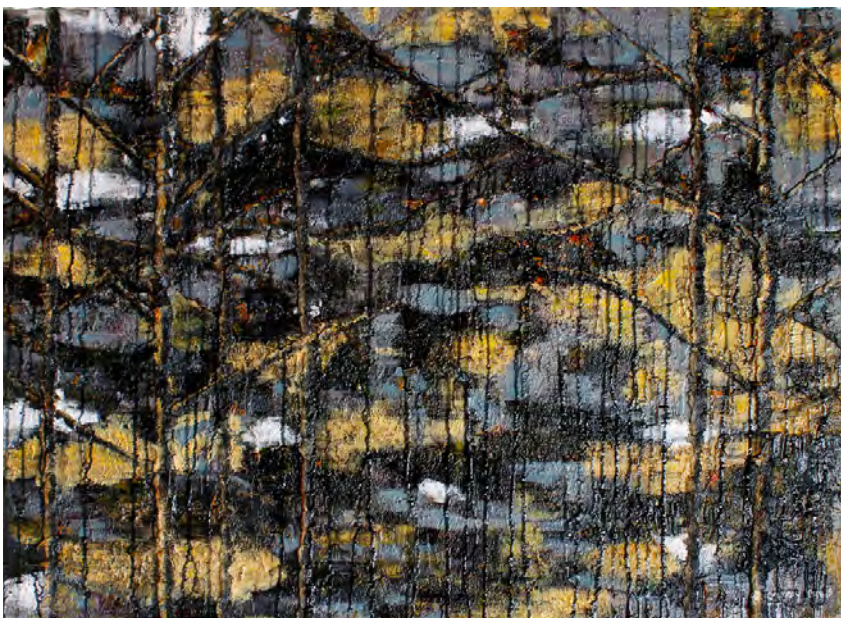
Maralyn: For someone who is new to discovering art, what would you recommend on how to explore the possibilities of what is out there?

Cammy: I encourage everyone to stop being afraid of art. Just yesterday, I had a nurse comment to me, "I love art, but I don't know anything about it; I'd probably say stupid things if I went to an

opening." It made me smile, because that is exactly why I started creating "Gallery tour" videos and creating art events for everyone. I want people to stop being afraid of art and just realize it's about inspiration. Just go to art events and enjoy them. Don't worry about what you will say or doing the wrong thing. Go, be inspired.

Maralyn: Have you been fortunate enough to have one or more showings?

Cammy: Yes, I exhibit at quite a few galleries and have had solo exhibits. The biggest exhibit was one I created for myself, and I encourage other artists to create their own opportunities. I spent a year creating an exhibit called "Connections" and chose a local photographer to do the exhibit with me. It featured nine couples or singles from Southern Oregon. I got a space in an old historic building on the busiest corner in our region, with huge windows and opened a pop-up gallery for a month that spanned two festivals. It's opening was during downtown ART+SOUND (of which I was art director and Edgy in October (an event I created). Other solo/duo exhibits were: Winter Textures at the Berryman Gallery, The Root of All Questions at Art Presence Art Center and Who Has the Time at Artistic Elements. I am currently hanging at PUSH Gallery, as the featured artist for April.



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Maralyn: What has been the biggest “Wow” moment in your career as an artist?

Cammy: I think my biggest “wow” moment was the opening for the Connections exhibit. The exhibit was a concept that had been in my mind for a year or two before I started the project, and then we worked on the exhibit for a year. It was this question I had about what makes connections/relationships work. I wanted to show answers in the art, and thought the play of an abstract painter with black and white photography would generate conversations about what we found. I interviewed each of the couples/singles with a series of questions that I audio-taped, and then the photographer would take pictures at the same time. We had the audio over mini-speaker by each of the

vignettes in the exhibit. The space was this huge, empty historic building. We built temporary walls shaped in vs, so people would step into them and be able to listen to the audio if they chose. The “wow” moment was watching a crowd, that was not an art crowd view the pieces. It worked! We had a board where they could write their thoughts at the end, and reading them afterwards was amazing. Having people come up to me and talk about the different couples and what they learned about the couples from the art...it was just amazing; very inspiring as an artist.

Maralyn: Tell us an interesting story about yourself that you have not already covered.

Cammy: When I got divorced 17 years ago, I took an office job, moved to the

suburbs and tried to create this middle-class life I always longed for, as the child growing up in the Airstream trailer. I worked 60-hour weeks, rarely spent time with my children and was stressed all the time. I combated this by spending my weekends painting, making things for the expensive town home I had bought for us. I made so much myself: a concrete brick fireplace, checkerboard birch plywood floor, metal wall, concrete and reclaimed lumber table in the hot pink dining room. I escaped to a creative life on the weekend, inside of my boring home that looked like every other boring home on the outside. One day, I looked out my window at the neighborhood I wanted to belong to and realized how empty it felt. I longed for a tiny home in the woods, where I grew vegetables and painted. In 2008, about this same

time, the economy collapsed. I was laid off my job in escrow. I sold my car and bought a Vespa that was our only form of transportation. I tried desperately to hang on to this life I had created. I’m glad I wasn’t able to. I got rid of all of our belongings and went back to school. When I graduated, I moved to Oregon to caretake my Grandma, which gave me a chance to build my art business. I’m glad I found the simple life again. I work harder now than I did then, but it’s doing something I love. I no longer escape on the weekends. I have nothing to escape from. My life is finally what it should have been all along.

You can reach Cammy Davis at art@cammydavis.com, cammydavis.com.

Check out her website for her jewelry line as well.

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