

IN THE STUDIO

an interview with artist Claudine Hellmuth

by Marney K. Makridakis

Claudine Hellmuth is an accomplished professional collage artist, a much-sought-after teacher, and the author of the much-awaited book, [Collage Discovery Workshop](#), published by North Light Books, and due to be released in December 2003.



She's the kind of person you wish would just bottle up her talent and knowledge so you could buy it at your local art, craft, or bookstore. Well, even though you can't get a bottle of "vintage Claudine" (at least not yet!), I'm thrilled to share with you the inspiring elixir she passed on to me in a recent interview for this issue of e-Artella. Like her artwork, Claudine is multi-layered, dynamic, and full of beauty. Read on to meet this fascinating artist!

MM: Did you always know you wanted to be an artist? What is your educational and professional background?

CH: It seems I have spent most of my life going to one art school or another. I attended private lessons throughout most of my grade school years and, once I got to high school, I went into art training with a highly esteemed teacher in Winter Park Florida, Barbara Basset. She taught out of her studio, and I studied with her four days a week for four or five-hour sessions. It was very intense artistic training and laid the groundwork for how I create my artwork today. I went to college first at the Columbus College of Art and Design. The president from Pratt Institute in New York had moved to CCAD, and it was also considered to be a wonderful art college for training artists in classical artistic thinking. By that I mean, all artists who went to CCAD at that time really learned how to draw, paint, and sculpt the figure. You learned all the necessary skills to create amazing lifelike works of art, complete with good composition and color theory.



The Star Maker
Mixed media collage, 10" x 8"

I studied at CCAD for two years and then decided to transfer to the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, D.C. While I felt I was getting really amazing training at CCAD, I didn't feel that I could conceptualize how I wanted to express myself. I felt that the change of pace and new scenery would do me good. So I finished my last two years and graduated with my BFA Degree from the Corcoran. It was an amazing experience -- our art history classes were often held at the National Gallery. Our artist studios were under the Corcoran Museum itself, and we were right across the street from the White House.

**(In the Studio with Claudine Hellmuth,
continued)**

MM: How long have you been making a living as an artist? What or when do you consider to be the beginning of your professional career?

CH: I've been making my living as an artist full time since 2001. But I always considered myself an artist my entire life. Now I get to put it on my tax return, too!

MM: You wear a lot of "hats" - fine artist, instructor, rubber stamp designer. What do you enjoy about the different aspects of your work? What came first, creating art or teaching?

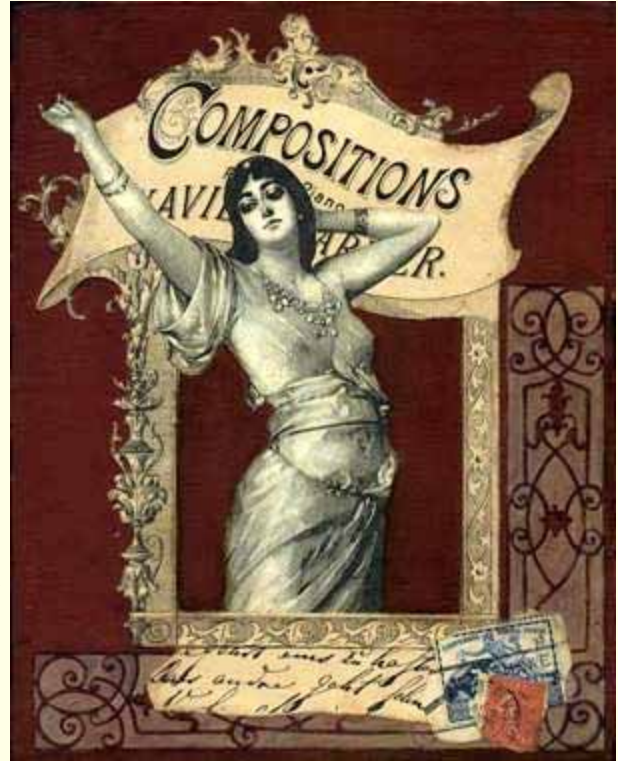
CH: Creating art came first, then I saw that people wanted me to teach them about the way that I create. I found that by teaching workshops I could support myself as an artist and one thing lead to another. I really enjoy teaching and getting to meet new people and sharing ideas, that is the most rewarding part of teaching workshops. I still struggle with all the travel, that part wears me out. But I found that by wearing lots of hats, teaching, creating art, doing stamp design and product design, I could make a living as an artist. It's not any one thing that supports me, it's all these aspects coming together that help me to make a living as an artist.

MM: Where do you get the images you use in your collages? Do you create most of the elements yourself or use other sources?

CH: I generally use my own family photos, my own photographs and my own drawings. I also use "instant relatives" that I buy on ebay; these are photos that are sold in huge lots. I like to use various bits of vintage ephemera, etc. I always try to be careful of copyright since I am selling my artwork and images. I find ebay a great source for finding materials, as well as the smaller companies that package up supplies and sell them so you don't have to find them yourself!

MM: When you set out to work on a new collage or other artwork, what's the process?

CH: It is rare that I have a preconceived idea of the kind of art that I want to create before I make it. I usually start with a color or a background and slowly build the piece from there. I might have a focal element that I know that I would like to include in the piece, and then I find other pieces to play off that one element. It can take me weeks or even months to find all the right pieces for my artworks. I tend to have many pieces in various stages of creation at once.



**Compositions for the Piano
Mixed media collage, 10" x 8"**

(In the Studio with Claudine Hellmuth, continued)



The Trinity
Mixed media collage, 9" x 6"

MM: Can you walk me through a typical day in your studio?

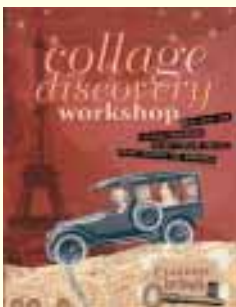
CH: Let's see, I usually check my email around lunch time and that takes most of day. I also deal with business stuff during the day, like phone calls, making promotional packets, getting mail ready to send out and workshop proposals, etc. I spend most of my time during the day on business type stuff. I walk the dog here and there and try to take a nap! Yum! Then at night, around 8pm, I finally get some ART energy and I go to work in the studio until about midnight or so.

MM: What is the biggest challenge you've ever faced in your professional career?

CH: I think the biggest challenge for me is to have faith that my career will keep going. To trust that this is what I am meant to do. I do spend a lot of time worrying about the future and if I'll be able to support myself and my family in the future, etc. I worry that one day no one will want to take my workshops or buy my art. It's really my biggest challenge, to stop worrying and just to get on with it and deal with things as they come.

MM: How did you get into licensing your art? What is your role in the licensing and marketing process, and what roles are played by other people/companies.

CH: I got into licensing my art because I didn't want to sell my original pieces. I found a rep for licensing who helps me find work and companies interested in my artwork. He also helps me with the contracts to make sure I don't get stuck in a nasty contract. Basically, I make the art and then we see if a company likes it. If they like it, then they reproduce it on a product and I get a tiny royalty. It's not enough to make a living, but if you can manage to hit the market just right, you can make a lot of money. The tough part for me is having to make the really mass market stuff. I don't mind it, but the work that I do for licensing doesn't excite me as much as some of my other work. Still that's the trade off. It's like doing illustration work. You are working to someone else's specifications.



MM: Your book, [Collage Discovery Workshop](#), is due out in December. Can you tell me a bit about the book? What prompted you write it, and what were the triumphs and challenges of the process? Will you write another book after this one?

**(In the Studio with Claudine Hellmuth,
continued)**

CH: Yes! the long awaited book! It feels like it has been forever in the making. I first thought about writing a book because a fellow artist and teacher, Sherrill Kahn, suggested it to me. Before that it had never dawned on me. She suggested some places for me to submit my manuscript and I did.

I based the book on two of my workshops, my “core” collage workshop “Revel in the Unexpected” and also my beeswax workshop “Waxing Poetic”. I also included a lot of tips on composition, which I feel is really important to having a good collage.

It was quite a challenge writing the book. First was making all the artwork for it. I was able to use some existing artwork for the book, but some needed to be made just for the book. That was exciting and stressful because I wanted it all to turn out really good! The actual writing of the text was a lot of fun. I didn’t mind doing that at all, but I had no idea how long a 128-page art book could be! Seemed I was writing forever!

I do hope to write another book. I have to see how well this one does in the marketplace. If it does well maybe I’ll be able to write another!

MM: Your collages are quite narrative in nature. Have you ever written about your own artwork?

CH: I do write in my journal about my art pieces. It was an exercise we learned to do when I was in college at the Corcoran. We were encouraged to write about our artworks after we were finished with them, and it really does help to focus your energies.



Souvenir of Quebec
Mixed media collage, 10” x 8”

MM: If you could lead another life in a parallel universe, what would you be doing?

CH: I think something with animals. I love animals so much. I would love to do animal rescue. We have rescued all of our pets and I just love them so dearly. So I think I’d like to have some big huge animal rescue center!



from The Valentine Series
Mixed media collage

**(In the Studio with Claudine Hellmuth,
continued)**

MM: Are there art techniques you've never tried but would like to explore?

CH: Hmm, not that I can think of! I have tried a lot of stuff! There are tons of discarded products from my trial and error phases.

MM: Do you have any advice to the people who are just beginning to explore collage and similar art forms?

CH: I think just to get in there and DO it! Don't worry about making perfect artwork for your living room -- just do something and have fun and make something from the heart!

MM: What about people who want to make the leap into selling their artwork - any advice for them?

CH: I think having some sort of business plan is helpful, as well as a Web site and a business card. My Web site has brought me so much business. I think if you are a visual artist and you want to sell your artwork you must have a Web site!

MM: What lies ahead in your future? How would you like your business to grow? How do you see your life changing?

CH: I don't know. That sounds like the million dollar question. Ideally, I would like to be able to spend more time at home and do less travel. I am focusing on growing my business in the licensing and product arena to maybe achieve the goal of less travel. Right now, I am along for the ride and I will have to see where it takes me next!!



**Seasons (series)
Mixed media collage**



For more information about Claudine Hellmuth, visit www.ClaudineHellmuth.com!