

# **Darlene Olivia McElroy**

american contemporary narrative artist

## **When were you aware that you were an artist?**

I remember being 4 years old drawing a mural on my bedroom wall and thinking to myself – How cool is this! I still think how cool it is to possess a built-in toy.

## **When did you start to make art?**

As soon as I could hold a pencil or crayon, I was off on my art career. My bedroom walls were my first real canvas much to my mother's dismay.

## **What drove you to make art as a professional activity?**

I consider myself a story teller. With my illustration background I would paint stories for myself. When my friends started buying my art it opened my eyes to the big world I could tell my stories to.

## **Did you do something else professionally before becoming a full time artist?**

My background has been as an educator, illustrator and web designer both here and in France. I have always made my living with something that had to do with art and design.

## **In what way does your inspiration transform into ideas?**

My inspiration can be a word, an image, a shadow. I start the voyage of creating a piece of art in a very stream of consciousness manner. It is like a puzzle slowly revealing the image or like reading Turkish coffee grounds where the story is revealed only by the combination of thousands of small vignettes and images.

## **From ideas to the creation of art, what is your process?**

My work always starts with an abstracted background. Once I have the start of an idea, I start blocking in color with many layers of surface treatments and glazes. Then I add images, often over painting them to give them an aged look before adding any collage elements. During this process the story appears and it often it is a surprise to me as the story may have gone through many changes before it is resolved.

## **Could your ideas be portrayed in any other medium? If so which?**

I often create narrative assemblage pieces – both wall hung and sculptural. They tend to be monochromatic and are a joy to create in a different way than a 2 dimensional piece.

## **What does being an artist mean to you?**

Being an artist gives me peace within, allows me to grow and learn continually and explore possibilities of themes, color and concepts plus it just a lot of fun!

## **Have you ever exhibited in a museum?**

I have shown in museums in both group shows and a two-person shows.

## **Where did you begin showing your art? Who were your best galleries? Why?**

I began showing my mixed media art in my early 20's in juried shows in the Bay Area.

My best gallery is La Posada Resort in Santa Fe where people get to live with the work during their Santa Fe stay. Many people have later bought pieces they remembered from their visit. Both Segreto (Santa Fe) and Victoria Boyce Gallery (Scottsdale) were both great galleries that gave me a great kickoff for my career. It is important to have a close relationship with your gallery and gallerists.

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## **As a professional artist, are there trade-offs that make life hard?**

None that I have found so far. I find the people I meet very interesting and informative, the days are less stressful and I get to do what I love best. I love marketing and talking to people so that is a big help that a lot of other artists seem to have issues with.

## **When do you consider your art is successful?**

When I learned something in the process of creating, when I can go no further with the piece and when it elicits a response from a viewer. I consider each piece a step closer to being a master of my craft as I learn something new from each piece I touch and that is success to me.

## **Who tends to buy your work?**

The majority of my collectors are women of all ages. My youngest collector was a 14 year old and my oldest was a famous artist in her late 80's.

## **What is the worst thing professionally that has happened to you as an artist?**

I had a gallery in Taos that closed in the middle of the night but the property manager called all the artists that were left stranded and I got all my art work back.

## **Who prices your work? How is the price decided upon?**

Most of the times I price my work though my galleries have occasionally adjusted my prices. My prices are based on size and the pricing of my peers. It's like porridge and the three bears where one has to find the price that is "just right".

## **What is your next project, painting or plan?**

I have several projects in mind. I am in the mood to do a thematic series and, at the same time, work on bigger pieces of art.

## **What are the pros and cons of being part of the art market?**

I think the pros are the interesting life, creative friends and all the great tips and techniques I get to learn with while the negative is trying to fit all the business work into my painting schedule. There is never enough time.

## **Do you ever give your work away? If so, to whom?**

I have two personal charities that I support with my work and I make a point every year to give a piece to a young person to start them as a future collector.

## **How do you feel about charities asking for your work? What is your standard answer?**

Without getting the buyer's info and their name on all the publicity there is no reason to donate art. It makes more sense if someone buys the art and they donate it while the artist donates the money they received.

## **Are you self-taught or do you have formal art training? If you could have been educated differently, would you ?**

I have gone to several great art schools. If I could change anything, it would just have been to have more time to paint.

## **Who has been the biggest influence on your work?**

Rauschenberg, Max Ernst, Tapis, The Renaissance artists.