



photo: David Paul Bayles

The Vibrant One | Carolee Clark

By Mj DeArmitt

Style and technique are two important components to an artist. Every artist seeks time to develop her craft and create a unified body of work. An artist’s style can be as unique as her signature, and is often dependent on her medium. Artist Carolee Clark is an exception to this rule. Clark’s vibrant use of color has persisted through a major transition of media and genre.

Like many artists, Clark’s love of art began at an early age. “My mother always enjoyed painting,” Clark says, “and she would encourage me and my sisters to draw while she set

up her easel. I’ve been drawing as far back as I can remember, but when I was twenty, my mother gave me a small set of watercolors, and I was hooked. They unlocked a world of color for me.” Clark would eventually become known for her vibrant use of color.

Clark worked in watercolors for years, yet even after winning awards in the medium, she suddenly and unexpectedly switched to acrylic. Like any artist making a jump in medium, she was nervous her body of work would shift and become unrecognizable.

“I decided that I would experiment with a completely foreign subject matter, non-objective abstract, when I made the transition. I had a showing of these paintings in a local hospital and some time afterward, a woman came up to me and said she had known immediately that they were my paintings!”

Clark was astonished. “I asked how she knew, and she said that my color choices are the same and it just felt like my work.”



Clark family cabin - Killenney Beach, Okanagan Lake, BC

Clark grew up in the beautiful Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. Her family would spend the hot summers at their cabin on the lake, where Clark and her two sisters would draw while her mother painted en plein air on the shoreline.

Clark recalls, “I have been exposed to art my entire life. My mom had her paintings around the house and she enjoyed sharing the experience of creating artwork with her daughters. I always had crayons and pencils in my hand, and I loved it.”

Having grown up surrounded by art, and interested in exploring and expanding her own abilities, Clark knew she wanted to pursue art. Her parents however, were concerned that Clark wouldn’t generate enough income with her art, and encouraged her to pursue a more traditional career path.

“On one hand they wanted to encourage my love of art, and on the other, they feared for my ability to feed myself.”

Clark entered school for business, focusing on economics, even though she knew art was her true passion.

After several years of college, Clark left school to open a business providing freelance secretarial and office services to small businesses. The business grew, and eventually Clark sold it for a tidy profit.

At first, Clark thought about starting another business but quickly reconsidered. “I realized that I didn’t want to re-invest in another venture and delay my desire to follow artistic endeavors. I want to enjoy life doing the things I love. I decided that I would live more frugally, and focus on the things that make me happy.” Art quickly became her highest priority.

As she began focusing on creating, Clark also started spending more time in nature. On a seven day bike tour, Tour British Columbia, Clark fell in love with a fellow adventurer and wasted no time marrying and moving with him to Oregon. “Our courtship was not a long one before we were married,” she admits with a laugh.

As with her whirlwind marriage, one can see Clark’s adventurous spirit in each of her



Clark and her husband Rob

paintings. Her paintings seem to be of common places - homes, landscapes, cars, or even the steps of a coffee shop - but the color and vibrancy of her work invite the viewer to look closer and experience the wonder of these seemingly ordinary places.

When asked what subject matter she prefers, Clark says, "I need very little to inspire me. I carry my sketchbook with me wherever I go. I'll draw people in cafes, airports and restaurants. I'll draw cars in parking lots or while I sit in a traffic jam. I'll draw buildings, houses, or garbage cans—anything in front of me."

Clark primarily learned what she liked to paint when she set a goal to paint six paintings every week for a year. "I think it was more a matter of whittling away what wasn't natural for me to paint. I needed a lot of subject matter quickly. I had to think of something to paint, sketch it, paint it, photograph it, and finally post it all in about eight hours. I had lots of time to experiment with different

subject matter and techniques. Since I have drawn from the figure for over twenty years, and enjoy it, this was an obvious choice. Of course the landscape is always available. In contrast, while I enjoy looking at a painting of a still life I'm not a collector of things and didn't have the stuff or patience to set something up every day. I love flowers, but I am not a gardener and therefore have very little floral material from which to work."

When asked who her major artistic influences are, Clark is not quick to drop the



Growing Close | 30" x 30" | Acrylic

names of the famous. "The Willamette Valley has amazing artists and I was lucky to be included. I was working closely with a critique group of some very strong artists. I learned a lot."



Sales are Bright | 20" x 20" | Acrylic

In fact, one of the most educational projects Clark has ever completed is a series of collaborative paintings she completed with Donna Beverly. “We had been painting together once a week for about seven years when, in 2007, Donna, who also works with acrylic, jokingly asked if we could paint on one another’s paintings. She was frustrated with her painting and was thinking about starting over. I said sure!”

Clark’s artwork can be found lighting up public and private collections in different corners of the world. Clark has sold her work through galleries and even more broadly on the internet. Her work has been featured on the cover of the Portuguese journal, *Psicologia*, as well as *Bethesda* magazine, and the artistic journal *Calyx*. She is also a member of [Philomath Open Studios Tour in Oregon](#), and

her art can be found in Ryan Gallery in Lincoln City, Oregon as well as Xanadu Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona.

When she’s not in her studio, Clark can be found playing golf, adventuring with her spouse, or taking care of her three cats. She is always expanding her media or technique, and is perpetually inspired by the beauty of her surroundings.

Every painting is like a wonderland reflection of the best parts of the world. Ever impulsive, bright, and whimsical, Clark’s artwork reflects the vibrant colors of her soul. There’s an integrity and honesty captured in each piece that will inspire a sense of wonder and exploration in her viewers and collectors.