



Hellmuth's collage art is generally limited to canvas, but she has ventured into some 3-dimensional projects, such as the greeting cards, above, and puppet, left.

# Wit and Whimsy

ARTIST CLAUDINE HELLMUTH INCORPORATES HUMOR AND PERSONAL HISTORIES INTO HER MIXED MEDIA COLLAGES.

By Jenny Carey

Poppets is the trademarked name Orlando collage artist Claudine Hellmuth has given her new body of artwork. "It was a childhood nickname from my English grandmother," explains Hellmuth. Incorporating a semblance of family history or personal story into her self-described "whimsical, mixed media collages" defines Hellmuth's artwork. So using "a nice memory of my grandmother" made perfect sense when she wanted to identify this body of art. Those familiar with her work will still recognize the same fine art collages using stretch canvas or paper, acrylic paints, pen and pencil or ink. These new pieces incorporate fewer vintage elements, yet still evoke the same sense of nostalgia, each telling a small story. >

A picture or photograph often is the beginning element of one of Hellmuth's pieces. She takes the image and "will have my way with it. Make up my own story; create my own environment, color and humorous elements."

Hellmuth works out of a studio in her home, explaining, "I have to be able to walk over to my studio in my pajamas." It doesn't often require much of a walk to sell her artwork either. Her work is sold exclusively through commission or from her Web site.

For an artist that has taken a traditional path towards an artistic career, Hellmuth has a less traditional and more modern approach to reaching an audience. She is not represented by a gallery, doesn't do outdoor shows and has never had a gallery show. "My whole direction has been targeted to a different audience," she says, "although I am not anti-gallery."

"She never wavered on her path to becoming an artist and says, "There was no doubt, even when I was a child; this is what I wanted to do."

Hellmuth was lucky to have a family that supported the arts and her passion — her father designed the Orlando International Airport — but Hellmuth's perseverance in pursuit of what she wanted to do was still impressive.

Five hours of private art lessons a day defined her junior and senior year of high school. And that didn't include travel time. After graduation, Hellmuth studied at the Columbus College of Art and Design in Columbus, Ohio, which she describes "like boot camp for the arts. It was great training."

The south was beginning to beckon, however. She left the cold and transferred to Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, D.C., only to end up in more snow. But the change in colleges proved to be an important one. "I was having trouble conceptualizing how I was going to express myself in a particular medium," says Hellmuth. "Corcoran College allowed me room to experiment."

After college, she spent time using her skills working in Web site design and then created a Web site for her own work. She says, "The Web site has been my way to build a career and be a full-time artist."

Interest from her Web site led to sales and commissions, but it also led to requests for workshops around the world. Hellmuth now travels regularly to wonderful locales such as Italy, presenting workshops at art retreats.

She "enjoys the interaction and watching how people interpret the techniques." In each workshop, she guides artists through their own individual artwork, teaching them how to incorporate new and different techniques. >



THESE NEW PIECES INCORPORATE FEWER VINTAGE ELEMENTS, YET STILL EVOKE THE SAME SENSE OF NOSTALGY EACH TELLING A SMALL STORY.

Hellmuth encourages the participants "not to focus on the finished product, but to experiment, enjoy themselves and bring their work to the next level."

The workshops have been successful nationally and internationally, but Hellmuth is scaling back her schedule to "make progress in my own artwork" and allow time for the commission pieces she creates.

She says, "Sometimes it is hard to let a piece go. You create a piece and are excited about it; you want it to go to a good home."

Hellmuth's commission works are very personal. Each patron is encouraged "to share something about themselves, perhaps something from their own childhood. Then I put that in a new environment." A new whimsical environment. >

Hellmuth's fine art collages typically use stretch canvas or paper, acrylic paints, pen and pencil or ink. Hellmuth works in her studio, left, which has many examples of her work, including the pieces below.



Hellmuth, above, shows a book she made of her own childhood memories. At right, a page from the book was created focusing on the memory of her mother cooking the same recipe over and over again. The photo is of Hellmuth as a child.

HELLMUTH TYPES MUCH OF THE TEXT FOR HER COLLAGES ON HER 1920S REMINGTON TYPEWRITER TO GIVE IT AN AUTHENTIC FEEL.

Some unique, unusual element that represents a personal perspective is always part of the collage. A family who likes to travel, for example, might find themselves in a small bi-plane image, in one of Hellmuth's commissioned works.

Hellmuth soon will experience a brisk. Her artwork soon will be seen in its first "brick and mortar" location in Birmingham, Ala. She describes it as "more of a funky little shop than gallery."

Hellmuth encourages all emerging artists to have a Web site, stating, "The world is on the Internet." >



"MY LIFE AS AN ARTIST HAS TAKEN THIS WHOLE OTHER ROUTE. BUT I MAKE A LIVING. MAKE THE KIND OF ART I WANT TO CREATE AND DON'T HAVE TO MAKE ANY SACRIFICES." — CLAUDINE HELLMUTH

It is obvious Hellmuth feels fortunate things have worked out the way they have. "My life as an artist has taken this whole other route. But I make a living, make the kind of art I want to create and don't have to make any sacrifices." More than what many can say. See Claudine Hellmuth's work at [www.collageartist.com](http://www.collageartist.com).

Hellmuth's collage entitled "Date Night," above, is typical of her commission pieces, which usually incorporate some unique, unusual element that represents a personal perspective.

A corner of Hellmuth's studio shows her flair for the humorous and whimsical.

