

LISA L. CYR

Embrace Inspiration

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by Neely McLaughlin

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Lisa L. Cyr's mixed-media fantasy-inspired work invites the viewer to participate in her imaginative vision. That vision inspires both Cyr's paintings and her desire to encourage others in creative pursuits. "Create from the heart, innovate without boundaries, strive for greatness and speak to the culture in ways that inspire and motivate," she says, explaining, "I often use this quote I wrote on my website and other materials." The desire to encourage other artists is part of Cyr's own artistic path. She pursues her work with attention to its ability to speak to viewers. She also devotes considerable energy to helping others bring their artistic endeavors into the larger culture.

Freedom for personal expression and exploration is central to Cyr's understanding of her own work and of art itself. She appreciates the voice that her art gives her. "I am very much aware that I have been given an opportunity to say something meaningful. It is my hope that my efforts will somehow make a memorable and lasting impression," she says. These efforts have come to include not only Cyr's mixed-media work, but also the books and articles she writes, and the lectures and workshops she gives.

Artistic journey

Since childhood, Cyr has been artistically inclined. She grew up with encouragement to pursue her creative tendencies using whatever materials were available. "I was always encouraged to create with what was around me: whether it was scraps of paper, pencils and paint or remnant material, yarn and thread," she says. She studied fine art and illustration

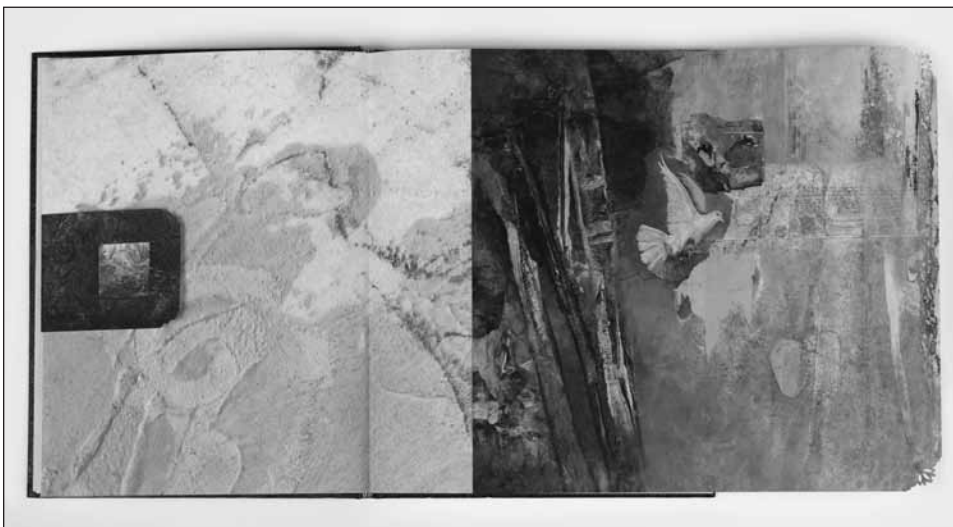
Neely McLaughlin is a writer and visiting assistant professor of English at the University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

in Boston at the Massachusetts College of Art, where she earned her bachelor of fine arts degree. She later received her master of arts degree from Syracuse University. Cyr has long been committed to her own artistic vision. “I learned early on that if I was in control of my creative content, then I had something that I could build upon,” she says. To Cyr, this dedication to a personal vision is an essential foundation for any artist. It is necessary for artistic success and becoming a mature artist. She explains, “To be successful, you must know who you are creatively. Allowing the market or someone else to dictate your journey only leads to a lack of authenticity and disconnection from the creative spirit that resides within.”

For Cyr, this personal commitment has led to a successful and wide-ranging career. She is now an established artist, author, speaker and teacher. She has an active presence online and has exhibited in museums, galleries, universities and at industry organizations, both nationally and internationally. Her work has been featured in numerous magazines, books, and online, including features in *Spectrum: The Best in Contemporary Fantastic Art*, and is included in the permanent collection of the Museum of American Illustration in New York City. She has written seven books on art and design, including the cutting-edge, mixed-media best sellers *Experimental Painting* and *Art Revolution* (North Light Books), and she writes for many of the creative industry’s leading art publications, including *Communication Arts*, *Applied Arts*, *The Artist’s Magazine*, *HOW*, *Step Inside Design*, *ID* and *Alt Pick*.

As a speaker, Cyr hopes to inspire artists and provide practical guidance for those seeking to develop their careers and audiences. She leads workshops for a variety of groups. Her focus is on promotional strategies, marketing opportunities and entrepreneurial endeavors for those in creative fields. Cyr consistently brings a creative perspective to these undertakings. Rather than experiencing a sense of tension between her art, her marketing, and her other professional engagements, she understands all of her work as part of her artistic life.

Cyr encourages others to pursue entrepreneurial work, which is for her complementary to a commitment to an individual artistic vision. She notes that she has seen artists lose their vision due to the power of external influences. “Staying true to the soul of your work is the only way to have a rewarding career for the long term. If a market doesn’t currently exist for the work that you love to do, make one.” This sense of the importance of creating an audience indicates the reason for Cyr’s emphasis on the benefit, even necessity, of creative entrepreneurship for an artist. Connecting with an audience in a wide variety of ways allows that audience to continue to increase and to develop in appreciation. Cyr urges artists to embrace innovation and to apply their creativity in a variety of ways, including developing new ways of discovering and building an audience. She explains, “Be willing to be entrepreneurial in your approach. Innovation often puts one first in line while others stand in the back trying to emulate. Don’t ever limit yourself or be afraid to try new things. Open your mind and imagine the myriad possibilities that exist.”



Juliette's Song is a sequential gatefold illustration from one of Cyr's multimedia sketchbooks.

Inspiration and imagination

Cyr always remains open to the inspirational potential of whatever she encounters or unearths. "Every day, I come across something that triggers my interests. From the mundane to the profound, I am inspired by life," she says. She approaches all that she encounters, from experiences and objects, to dreams and literature, as sources of inspiration. She maintains a persistent curiosity about how to use whatever life offers in her work. "All around, there are glimpses to something extraordinary. One only needs to be aware to discover the potential that surrounds us all."

Cyr's sources of inspiration are wide-ranging. Though she appreciates many different schools of visual art, she does not identify her work as particularly indebted to a specific artistic tradition. "Although I have artistic interests that range from the classical narratives of the Pre-Raphaelites to the abstract works of the Modern Era, my work seems to straddle the line between the poles," she explains. This all-encompassing aesthetic is evident in both Cyr's work and her approach to it.

Collaboration with other artists is one source of refreshment. "Over the years, I have collaborated with an amazing array of artists and designers, experiencing artistic expression through the eyes of some of the world's leading creative visionaries," Cyr says. She sees these interactions as mutually beneficial, a productive exchange of energy. She often turns to other art forms to maintain a sense of freshness and urgency. "Multidisciplinary exploration beyond my own creative repertoire breaks down the walls of stagnation, playing an integral part in my development as an artist," she says.



Cyr's *Voyage to Michaelania* (mixed media on clay board panel with wooden framework, 20×16×2) was inspired by a passage from one of her journals.

This habit of turning towards other creative forms and in some sense incorporating them into her life helps Cyr continually refresh her perspective. “Looking outside of my creative discipline allows for alternative ways of thinking to enter into the creative process. I love the theater, classic literature, dramatic film, instrumental music, vintage architecture and traveling.” New frameworks lead to new possibilities, and engaging in a wide range of experiences facilitates the development of such frameworks. Exposure to

sounds, sights and narratives, and immersion in different artistic endeavors, each with their own opportunities and particular limits, is a way to maintain an artistic life. “For me, exploring untapped territory creates the opportunity to look at the world through a different lens, creating a dynamic, multisensual smorgasbord of ideas.”

Informal work provides Cyr with the opportunity for creative flexibility. *Juliette's Song* is a sequential gatefold illustration from one of Cyr's sketchbooks that employs die-cut corners, a self-leveling clear gel and acrylic insert, and a reinforced back that uses magnets to clasp the molding paste textured bookmarker to the page. Such painted pages of her sketchbook frequently lead to more finished works. The play that takes place in these informal projects is itself a process of discovery and a chance for personal artistic growth. “Things that I could not have predicted occur. I find that when I push myself creatively, I discover alternative ways in which to conceptualize and create art.”

One particular source of inspiration for Cyr is the relationship between language and imagery. “I am a multidisciplinary artist and author with a content-driven approach. For me, word and image work in tandem to create a gateway to a higher consciousness,” she explains. Sometimes she finds that her words shape her pictures, while, at other times, her pictures shape her words. Cyr is often inspired by the content of her journals. “To expand my visual and verbal vernacular, I experiment, explore and play almost every day. Whether I am writing in my journals, drawing and painting in my mixed-media sketchbooks or working on an alternative surface, there are happy accidents that begin to happen,” she says.

For Cyr, the practice of journaling creates a space for imaginative exploration through language. In her journal, Cyr can develop a narrative and an image that might then result

in a painting. “In my painting *Voyage to Michaelania*, a passage from one of my journals was the impetus for the work,” she says. The passage reads: “A humble servant by day and a traveler by night, the young peasant girl dreams of a world known only to her in books. In the silence of the dark, the mind wanders past the earthly presence to another realm of existence. Like a captain of a ship, the courageous heart braves the unknown waters to explore new ports over the horizon. Through the amazing journey, she discovers her true potential and her ultimate destiny reveals itself.” The character and the world that feature in *Voyage to Michaelania* began with a word-based image, an atmosphere, and a character. Cyr then explored her idea in visual form, developing the character and world in a new way. She sees written and visual art as sharing a single imaginative source and believes that they interact productively.

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The importance of texture is evident in *The Courageous* (mixed media on linen canvas over Masonite panel and board with wooden frame-work, 30¼×9×2½).

Texture, scale and dimension

Texture is a recurring theme in Cyr’s paintings. She describes her work as “visually tactile” and has maintained a focus on mark-making as her work has developed. This emphasis suggests the value of awareness of touch for the visual artist, asking the viewer to become more fully engaged in experiencing her work. As she has developed as an artist, Cyr has become increasingly engaged in dimensionality, layering and employing a variety of formats and materials. Over time, her work has become larger in scale.

To maintain the complex texturing and dynamism central to her work on this larger scale, Cyr has incorporated tools from a variety of disciplines into her practice. “The tools that I use have evolved,” she explains. Such alternative tools have enabled Cyr’s mark-making to translate effectively on larger surfaces. Working large brings other practical challenges as well. For such large pieces, she often places work against a wall or even hangs it. In order to reach the entire surface of *Night Fury*, a large-scale pastel, charcoal, acrylic,

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A stool allows Cyr to reach the entire surface of *Night Fury*, a large-scale mixed-media work.

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In *Meditative Pathways* (mixed media on linen canvas over Masonite panel with wooden framework and inlaid boxes, 20×17×2), Cyr explores an alternative format through her use of inlaid boxes.

oil and other media work-in-progress, Cyr uses a stool.

Moving beyond two-dimensionality, Cyr reaches out into the viewer's space. "To push the picture plane into the third dimension, I insert boxes, apply imaginary windows and add sculptural assemblage accents," she explains. This aspect of her work connects with the audience spatially while also maintaining an awareness of distinction between the work of art and the viewer. Of this quality of her work, Cyr says, "The multidimensional, hybrid environment establishes a captivating pictorial stage, enticing the viewer from almost any angle."

Meditative Pathways illustrates this use of alternative formats with its use of inlaid boxes. The concept of staging, with its implication of a gap between the viewer and the work of art, productively contrasts with the fact that this work extends into the viewer's world, deliberately breaking the barrier between modes of space. Cyr also connects to the viewer through recognition. She appreciates a kind of clarity from the richly complex texture, discovers accessible imagery, and brings it forth. This aspect of her process illuminates the creative discovery process. "I love when something recognizable evolves out of layers of color, texture, and mark-making."

Art and culture

Cyr understands art to be a powerful force in the world. In reflecting on the relationship between fiction and visual art, she considers the power of the imagination. She explains, "Both fictional literature and fantastical art come from the depths of the imagi-



Masquerade of Wits (mixed media on Masonite with wooden framework, 23×26¾×1½) features a mask with delicate scrollwork.

nation, a world where everything is possible. One needs only to think it and it is so.” Cyr’s understanding of the imaginative realm as one in which thinking constitutes being emphasizes creativity as a tremendous power. The work of art enables a connection between artist and viewer, allowing the artist to communicate an individual, internal vision to others. “The imagination serves as the great oracle to the inner world,” she says. Through art, the imagination interacts with the larger culture.

Tellingly, Cyr first turns to imagery when exploring her understanding of what art means and does. “When you throw a stone into a lake, the splash creates waves and ripples

that penetrate outward, altering everything in its wake,” she says. That this image is not a static one suggests the importance of energy, movement, and interaction in Cyr’s approach. “We leave behind a footprint in our wake.”

Turning from the poetic to the practical, Cyr is attentive to the ways in which art participates in its world. “As artists, our work goes out into the culture through books, magazines, film, video, television, merchandising, websites and the walls of a public museum or gallery,” she says. These various possible artistic sites, whether in virtual or physical space, context through which art is inevitably understood, and awareness of that larger context in which art exists is crucial. That awareness of context is integrally connected to the essential recognition that art is in an important way created for an audience. She explains, “It is important for artists to be mindful that their artistic works are not created to be in a vacuum but instead shared with the world.” For Cyr, this awareness of audience and of the sites of interaction between art and artist results in consistent attention to the communicative potential of art. “Whether I am drawing, painting, writing, teaching or lecturing, my work is all about communicating with an audience on some level,” she says.

Cyr embraces technology as a way of connecting with audiences. The role and reach of various media outlets enables artists to communicate with a larger and more geographically scattered audience than has been possible in the past. “As an artist, my presence online through websites and social media allows for instant, broad-reaching and cost-effective communications to a worldwide audience.” Cyr notes that her work can be seen in portfolio-based websites, online webinars, video book trailers, e-books, syndicated artist blogs and numerous social networking sites. Each venue provides a window into her world



In *Self Awareness* (mixed media on linen canvas over Masonite panel and board with wooden framework, 30¼×21¼×2⅞), the neutral tones and quality of stillness invite the viewer to reflect.

as an artist. “The Web has opened the door for the printed page or gallery wall to be dynamic with sound, motion and interactive elements,” she adds.

Cyr embraces the opportunities of the Web, which she sees as facilitating connections between people with shared artistic interests. “The Web has allowed artists to build not only artistic communities but also a following of like-minded people.” Cyr embraces the expressive and communicative potential of the virtual world as central to the role of art. “The widespread penetration of web-based communications spans continents,” she says. Here, the cultural conversation surrounding art, a conversation that Cyr is committed to facilitating and participating in, thrives. “The activity level is ongoing, creating a vibrant and robust exchange.”

Cyr keeps up this exchange through her website, www.cyrstudio.com, her YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/lisalcyrstudio), her blogs at *Confessions of a Mixed Media Artist* (www.lisalcyr.blogspot.com) and *Word + Image* (www.lisalcyr.wordpress.com), as well as through Facebook and Twitter.