



Photography by  
Chris Villiers/  
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# COLLEEN E. MONETTE



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**COLLEEN** is a Seattle-based artist working with found and salvaged vintage and antique materials for assemblage and collage art as well as encaustic painting. She balances her work between her home studio and her studio at Fogue Studios & Gallery in the Georgetown neighborhood.

Colleen lives with her boyfriend, Larry, and their blind dog, Tater, in the Magnolia neighborhood overlooking Puget Sound and the mountains of the Olympic Peninsula. When she isn't painting or teaching, she loves spending time with Larry and Tater, just puttering around the house or searching for new-old treasures.



**I** TRULY BELIEVE I ENTERED THIS WORLD to become an artist. I preferred pencils and plain paper over dolls, I started “collections” of found objects (tiny old bones, dimes snuck from my father’s work pants, handmade Christmas ornaments made with my mother’s hair clips), and I loved all my treasures intensely.

Born in 1961, I was a country kid, barefoot in the summer and riding my bike everywhere in our little Eastern Washington town of Arden, where my mom still lives in the same house I grew up in. Though I couldn’t wait to get away, I like remembering how easy it was to live simply.

I excelled at art in school, and I dreamt of becoming a famous artist. I wanted to believe that Claude Monet was a long-lost relative and that I would move to France to live and paint. In college, I took lots of art classes and studied French but left after two years to move to Seattle to find myself.

My first real job fell into my lap, a position at Nordstrom in the display department. It was a great opportunity to learn how to build props, design sets and arrange merchandise. I was fortunate to have several more creative careers after that; I was a high-end florist and antique shop owner. These choices shaped me into the artist I am today.

**A**FTER LEAVING MY JOB with Nordstrom in 1999 (best job ever), I opened a little flower shop in Old Burien, south of Seattle. I filled it with amazing fixtures and antiques, focusing on handmade merchandise and scrumptious flower arrangements. When the space next door became available, I knew it would become my antique shop, Nest Vintage Home and Garden.

What could be better than being surrounded by antiques AND flowers? Nothing ... best jobs ever! And in between flowers and dusty antiques, I took encaustic painting classes and other art workshops where I made some wonderful art just for myself. I lacked the drive and confidence to take that final step to be an artist (I was one, I just didn't know it yet), but I learned to appreciate beautiful things: hand-crafted objects, fragile and fragrant flowers, and unearthed finds from a different time and place.

In 2010, we moved to Walla Walla, Washington. This was such an important time because it was the start of my journey as a working artist. Knowing I had time on my hands, I put all my energy into our beautiful 1907 house, filling it with antiques I had salvaged from my business. I designed a beautiful workspace to create in. Though I traveled to Seattle several times a year for large floral jobs, I decided to try teaching encaustic painting as an additional means of income and to fill my time.

I discovered I really enjoyed teaching. Walla Walla is known for wine, so I included the wine, creating Wax and Wine encaustic workshops. I joined the local art group and started showing at festivals and in tasting rooms and restaurants around Walla Walla. I finally felt like an artist.

We returned to Seattle in 2014, where I now felt invisible as an artist, so different from my time as a florist where my confidence and the demand for my work was high. I knew the path ahead would be up to me to create. I retreated to my home studio, a safe and soothing space, and continued making art. Over time, I found





“It was neither preaching nor praying that made a better person (man) of me, but one or two people who believed in me better than I deserved, and I hated to disappoint them.”

— OWEN WISTER

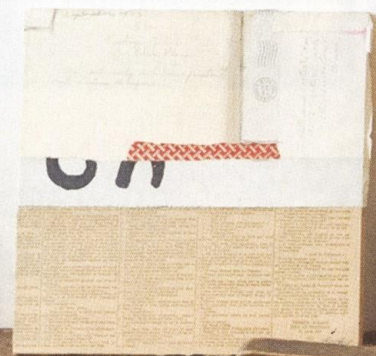
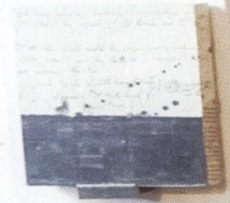
I MADE A PROMISE when we returned to Seattle to do three things: create a website, find a studio space and apply to a residency. I slowly moved away from my floral commitments and toward my art practice. Finding a place to create was serendipity, as a new gallery was opening in early 2018: Fogue Studios & Gallery, a community of older (as in old fogeys) artists. I happily joined, and in November 2018, I was accepted into an artist residency at Chateau d’Orquevaux in France. That was truly an amazing experience.

In early 2019, I was able to rent a studio space at Fogue (FogueStudios.com), where I had been showing my work. Though my website took the longest to complete, speaking my intentions out loud really does work. My encaustic painting became encaustic collage, which led to straight-up collage, which, as you all know, is a sure gateway to assemblage art. All my collections, my found objects that I’d been hoarding, had been patiently waiting for me to discover that they were material for my art all along. Giving them a new and honored life fills my soul.

There is also an intention to everything in my two studios. Whether it’s a gift from a dear friend, something that makes me giggle, or something that becomes an element within my work, I find a place for it. Some days are filled with moving fixtures around to make space for a new one, reworking my cabinet of curiosities or binge-watching Netflix. I’m in my space. I’ve filled it with other people’s long-lost memories and belongings that I like to think they’ve gladly given their permission for me to create with and love.



I’ve dedicated an entire wall in my home studio to the work of others, those I admire and am inspired by. Many were created by my teachers, my motivators and my dear friends. I was quite excited when I found an old snack machine on Etsy during the unexpected globally imposed “downtime.” I thought I’d just as well buy it, not knowing if I’d be able to return to my studio or not. It has been a fun addition, which I’ve filled with small one-of-a-kind pieces of my art.





**I** DEFINE MYSELF AS A SALVAGE ARTIST. I am drawn to the beauty and the destruction of objects, making art from life. My style, my aesthetic, is much like a historian or archaeologist — to preserve what I unearth. There's a deep connection I feel to the past, to the person who penned the letter, the faces in a photograph, an old workman's tool, the beauty and the decay. I collect ancient documents, old letters, small objects that have seen better days. All these things need a place to wait for me, so finding the right fixtures became an obsession and a life of its own.

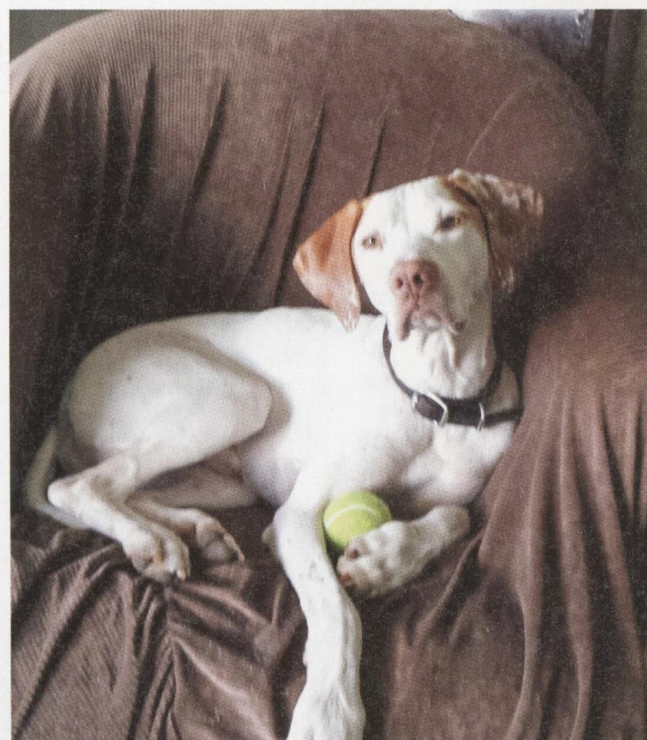


Drawers. Need I say more? I am obsessed with drawers. Wood flat file cabinets, metal map drawers, small boxes and discarded drawers that I can fill and fill and fill. And the older, the better. When I first moved into my studio, the previous artist had graciously left me a modern table. I tried covering it with an old canvas but eventually had to replace it with old, well-worn worktables.

My favorite piece is an old fixture of drawers left behind in the basement of a house. It was free; all I had to do was figure out how to get it out of that basement! It was most likely used to hold tools, all marked up with kids' initials and obviously used for BB gun target practice. It's just perfectly imperfect.

**R**IGHT NOW, I am in love with collage. I combine bits of ephemera, some centuries apart, through folding, tearing, layering and peeling back, exposing an identity lost and creating a new history. I also feel the importance of using the original materials, not copies, to lend authenticity to myself and the voices I'm hoping to bring to the original owners. Happiness for me is an old book, a handwritten love letter, a child's drawing. A scrap of paper kept to remember an event so magical that it was glued to a page in a scrapbook, saved for all eternity. I find collage to be a way to give life to an old story. It's in the retelling that we find meaning.

What's ahead? I have no idea. I do know I will continue traveling this path I've made for myself, tripping on the stones in the way, jumping over puddles and breathing through the steep elevations. At 61, I am right where I want to be. It's never too late to travel your best path.



**POSTSCRIPT:** Tater, our blind English Pointer ... how I have tried to bring him to the studio but to no avail. We lost his sister, Maddy, a GSP, over a year ago, and since then, he has been content to sleep and eat cookies and dream about when he once could chase the ball and wrestle with his sister.

**More on Colleen**  
*i* [www.CEMonetteArt.com](http://www.CEMonetteArt.com)  
**Instagram:** C.E.MonetteArt  
**Facebook:** ColleenEMonetteArt  
**Pinterest:** CollieBeth



Photographer **CHRIS VILLIERS** doesn't believe the old adage that there are two sides to every story. "There's probably a dozen, if not a hundred," he says.

Villiers' photography reflects that view, as he uses multiple cameras and techniques (including soaking film in seawater, soaps, and alcoholic beverages) to uncover the beauty of commonplace items.

He picked up a camera following a 30-plus-year career writing for newspapers and major corporations. Working largely in black and white, Villiers now focuses on fine art photography and supporting nonprofits, artists and musicians.

His images have been featured in galleries and magazines throughout the country, including the Midwest Center for Photography in Wichita, PhotoPlace Gallery in Vermont, Las Laguna Art Gallery in California, Fogue Studios & Gallery in Seattle, and *Black and White* magazine.

**More on Chris**  
*i* [www.ChrisVilliers.net](http://www.ChrisVilliers.net)  
 Instagram: Christopher.M.Villiers