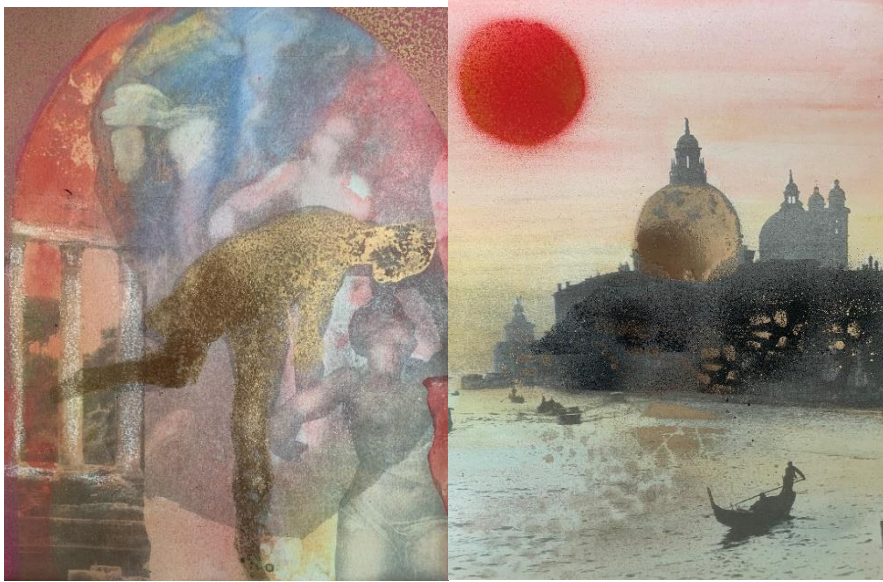


Mind of the Artist – Kim DiDonato-Murrell – February 2021

Making art is now a big part of my life, but for years it simmered on the back burner. As a child I loved to draw and work with clay. In college I chose safe majors (economics and international relations), but I also took art history and photography classes, including darkroom technique. A passion for photography blossomed during graduate school in Italy and the urban photography I did while there still finds its way into my artwork as can be seen in these recent works from my Venetian Resilience series.



Tarquin and Lucretia (after Tintoretto) No. 1, 7.5x9.5, Mixed media on archival paper
Venice, Salute, No. 3, 7.5x9.5, mixed media on archival paper

This body of work came about in response to the pandemic last summer as I was thinking about the great artists of Renaissance Italy like Tintoretto and Titian, and how they created fabulous works of art during successive periods of plague, and afterwards, helped to build and adorn the grand plague churches of which Santa Maria della Salute in Venice is one. I have painted in Italy several times so as I was referencing back to my journals and photos, I decided to incorporate elements of my old photos of Venice and Rome in order to link my personal history as an artist with these cities I love. These mixed media compositions utilize photography, transfer techniques, ink jet printing and paint application by brush and spray in a layered iterative process.



Charcoal on paper 22 x 30



Moe, Life size bust, clay

Over the past 20 years, while juggling family and career in Washington and London, I continued pursuing my interest in art by taking a variety of classes in different mediums and styles. I have been lucky to study with some terrific teachers of representational drawing and painting like Gavin Glakas, Christine Lashley and Jordan Bruns at the Yellow Barn. Later I discovered the joys and challenges of abstract painting and was guided by Alexandria Art League teachers like Bev Ryan, Marsha Staiger and Delna Dastur who inspired and helped me find the delicate balance between intuitive painting and a more studied approach to composition and color. I had been contemplating doing an MFA and in fact was taking classes at the New York Academy of Art, which has a great program, until the pandemic disrupted that plan.



Black & Beige, acrylic, 30x40



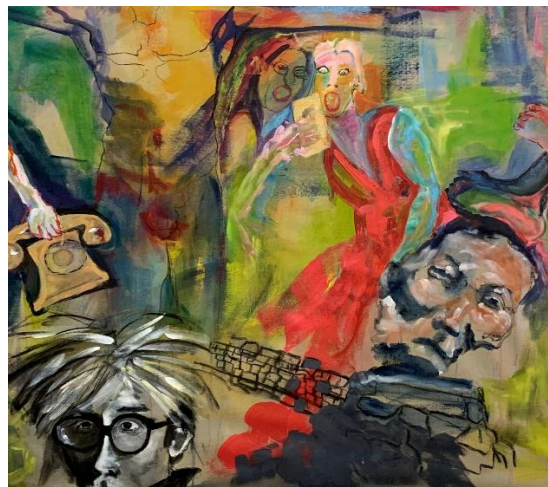
Triptych, acrylic, 40x48

I don't like to box myself in, but I tend more towards abstraction than representation and these days I paint more than sculpt or photograph. My influences are many and varied. I remember being blown away in front of a painting by Cecily Brown that I saw in Gagosian gallery in London about 10 years ago. The way she painted the entwined figures - abstracted yet representational - hiding and emerging in layers of luscious rose-hued paint and gorgeous brushstrokes. I wanted to paint like her but didn't dare. I felt my abilities - with my photographer's more graphic eye - were better suited to the monochromatic palette of the abstract expressionist painters I loved such as Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell. I think that some of my most successful paintings are what I call my black and whites, and it is a palette I return to again and again after forays into more colorful worlds. Above are two examples – one from a few years ago, and the second a very recent triptych that is still sitting on my easel waiting for my verdict. These Giacometti-like figures have been dancing around my brain for the past few months and have been appearing in variation in my *Walk on the Wild Side* series.



Rockslip at Boulder, acrylic and collage on canvas, 24x36 *Foothills at Sunset*, acrylic and collage on canvas, 30x40

I've never had trouble finding things to inspire me, but like many artists, I find that travel always awakens the senses and gets the creativity sparking. I always travel with a sketchbook but I'm easily distracted and it usually ends up only partially full so I've found that photo references and jotted notes do more to trigger ideas back in the studio. A series I completed a few years back was inspired by Boulder, Colorado where I hiked the creek just outside the city with my son who was starting college there. A line from the photographer Ansel Adams had a big impact on my choice of colors: referring to a mountain vista he wrote, "A glitter of green and golden wonder in a vast edifice of stone and space". I just loved this description, and I chose my palette based on this. These two paintings have both been shown widely - *Rockslip* even traveled to a national show in Naples, Florida - and *Foothills* won an honorable mention at the Hill Center Galleries Juried exhibition a couple of years ago.



Death by Narcissism or 15 Minutes of Fame, acrylic and crayon on raw canvas, 7'x7'

Finally, I'll mention that I have completed a couple of large-scale narrative paintings over the past few years. The most recent was in Venice, Italy in 2019 during the 58th Art Biennale. There I discovered the political paintings of the South African/UK artist Michael Armitage who inspired me to paint a big narrative work. I find the mental process of coming up with a narrative intention fascinating. My idea was a commentary of sorts on selfie culture as the possibility of selfie stick-induced death on the Rialto bridge was a constant source of speculation among the Venetians who were vastly outnumbered by the tourists. At the time of painting, 250 people worldwide had been killed while taking selfies - a pretty crazy fact to wrap your head around. The overarching structure of my painting references a scene between Andy Warhol and Jim Morrison in the film *The Doors* and includes other American and Italian cultural references. It was shown at the palazzo in Venice where I was painting, which was primarily attended by German and Austrian artists. For the whole week I worked on it they would stop by my studio to ask me about another component emerging from this enormous 7' x 7' canvas. While I am not sure I'll be rushing to paint another one anytime soon, that week was the biggest artistic thrill of my life - so far.

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