

Love, Light & The Pursuit of Art

Cami Thompson's upcoming exhibition at Taos Art Museum reveals a lifetime of dedication to the spirituality of nature.



High In The Aspens oil 18 by 18 inches

Cami Thompson's passion for oil painting radiates from her expressive eyes with the same brilliance as the sunlight dappling the golden aspen leaves on the canvas before her. When in 'the zone,' classical music or jazz playing in the background, she practically dances before the easel, focused upon the image that impatiently waits to be born from tubes of paint and her expertly directed brush. Magic is about to happen, though the artist herself is reticent to define her process as anything more than discipline and the rewards of her upbringing.

"I was gifted by my mother with the value of collaboration and dialogue, and by my father with the value of business filled with grace, and I'm grateful for that legacy. It supported both the creative and practical sides of my art and made it possible for me to achieve success as a

fine artist," says Thompson. "But I'm also proud that I was able to create jobs and employ other artists, support the arts, and educate many." Indeed, over her decades-long career Thompson has garnered recognition and awards which stand as testament to her journey of achievement.

Thompson's solo exhibition, presented by the Taos Art Museum at Fechin House, is thus aptly named "Love, Light & The Pursuit of Art." For visitors it is a comprehensive show of compelling works, from Thompson's renowned

landscapes depicting the majesty of the American West, to portraits of wildlife whose eyes shine with a sophic light. Interspersed throughout are her gorgeously wrought floral paintings whose petals jump from the canvas with textural fluidity. To the artist, the invitation to exhibit is the utmost honor of a life spent honing her craft with intention and integrity.

By Dena Miller



Rio Grande Overlook (Rio Grande del Norte National Monument)
oil 24 by 30 inches

“Early on, I was painting images of what I saw around me,” Thompson says, referring to her childhood home in Michigan. “It was about establishing a sense of place, though I didn’t then see it as such; it was about the proliferation of color and form that surrounded me. My mother, who also had an artistic eye, used to critique my drawings and paintings, asking me if I thought they were complete, or needed more depth and reference. What a valuable lesson, teaching me to accept give-and-take on my work, and to see my surroundings from a larger yet focused perspective.”

Thompson’s father, a successful businessman, encouraged her to listen to both her heart and her head in determining a path by which she would chart her life and, under that guidance, she determined her path would be in nature. “The awareness that developed with my childhood paintings made me feel deeply connected to wildlife, trees, flowers, and all the earth offers. I knew that honoring the spirituality of nature was the direction that life would take me.”

However, she could not have foreseen the many curves in the road that has since led to northern New Mexico and her studio with views sweeping between the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and Wild Rivers National Monument.

Two years into a Fine Arts degree at Hope College, Thompson began working at the New York City showroom of Herman Miller, the groundbreaking research-based design firm. She was so taken by their creative, yet technical, approach to form and function that she left college and instead enrolled at Kendall School of Design to pursue commercial design.

In the early 1970s she had made her way to the Rocky Mountains and established a thriving business designing elaborate needlepoint canvasses. “I remained true to my commitment to honor nature, and used its beauty surrounding me as inspiration for my designs,” says Thompson. Employing other local artists, Thompson and her staff hand painted, stitch by stitch, each intricately detailed canvas imbued with sumptuous color and pattern. Many of the finished tapestries are found in important international collections, and the patterns themselves remain in demand.

By 1980 Thompson had moved into the design of wearable fine art, with each seasonal collection featuring blouses and skirts fashioned from luxurious silks and velvets, and embellished with hand-painted details and individually crafted silk feathers and flowers. The innovative yet timeless designs enjoyed tremendous success, with several pieces included in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Despite her notable entrepreneurial ventures, Thompson never strayed far from her love of fine art painting. During the 1990s she traveled between the Rockies and Alaska, leading workshops and amassing an array of her own *plein air* works. “I spent so much time painting outdoors in Kodiak I became known locally as the ‘drive-by’ artist,” she laughs. In 2001 Thompson moved permanently to northern New Mexico, her eyes set upon the grandeur and luminescence of its unique landscape.



Harbor Brights oil 12 by 24 inches



Hollyhocks oil 8 by 16 inches

“Through my paintings I try to give a new perspective on this amazing region, to show a side of New Mexico that isn’t often portrayed, or to capture the play of light in a fresh and innovative way.”

Thompson’s works accomplish just that. Painterly and reminiscent in style of the traditional painters of Europe—a result of her studies with masters of the craft—they glow as if lit from within, rendering an effect that is mesmerizing. “By underpainting in either sepia or red and blue tones, I set the stage for the ambience that will come through the finished work,” she explains. Thompson then works in transparent oil colors that are applied using linseed oil, building layer after layer of gossamer texture with rich color permeating throughout. When the piece is complete, she applies a varnish finish that not only preserves the painting but also heightens the sense that one is standing before the work of an Old Master.

High in the Aspens is a wonderful example of the reverence in which she holds the landscape and of her competence with brush and palette. Peeking from behind the burnished autumn leaves, the mountains stand awash in the legendary Taos light that stipples cerulean with dabs of violet upon them. *Hollyhocks* shines as a simply yet perfectly composed still life, its spires festooned with ruffly flowers of crimson and burgundy and nestled in a bed of sweet wildflowers. The adobe reflects light and shadow back into the composition so that each leaf and petal is framed with haloes of delicate sunshine.

Along with her renowned oil paintings done both *en plein air* and in studio, she is widely regarded for her commissioned pieces which often begin with a photograph but always conclude with a work that is a collaborative vision. “This is where the legacy of my mother really comes into play. The dialogue I have with my clients and the exchange of ideas always generates excitement that is transmitted to the final piece. It is a real pleasure for me.”

Thompson and her husband John are avid outdoors persons who, when not skiing or hiking, are tending to their abundant garden that supplies much of their food. “We love to entertain our family, friends and clients here,” she says, as she takes in the stunning views bursting through the large windows facing Wild Rivers. “It’s a retreat for them, and we are blessed to share it with so many.”

In spending time with the award-winning artist, her authenticity, generosity and spiritual connectivity come shining through. “I am grateful to have had a career that has been so well received and well recognized. However, the best award for me is to have my paintings give light to the lives of others.”

Love, Light & the Pursuit of Art,” featuring works by Cami Thompson, will open September 27 at Taos Art Museum, 227 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, with a reception from 4 to 7pm. The exhibition will continue through December 4. 575.758.2690. taosartmuseum.org. Additional works by Cami Thompson can be viewed at camithompsonartist.com.



Lunch In Taos oil 9 by 12 inches