



Megan Coyle

Above: "Leisure Day," 18" x 24"

Opposite: "Two's a Crowd," 24" x 18"

Elements of Surprise

CREATING PAINTERLY EFFECTS
WITH PAPER

BY DONNA CEDAR-SOUTHWORTH

At first glance, many viewers assume that Megan Coyle's medium is either acrylics or oils. "Once I tell them it's a collage," says the artist, "they'll get closer to the artwork and notice pieces of paper that have been intricately layered to achieve this 'painterly' surface. I like surprising my viewers—I like it when they don't realize I'm a collage artist.... Perhaps I should say, 'I am a painter—I paint with paper.'"

Although some collagists build their works with colored and textured papers, Megan prefers to use pages from magazines. "I tried working in mixed media, using a lot of paint and oil pastel, where you can mix colors as you're going along," she says. "But...when I'm flipping through magazines, I never have complete control over the colors that I can use. I do have control over what I select, but there's this element of surprise while you're working on a piece—you're not sure what textures might come up that might actually work. Sometimes





"I believe my attachment to collage is rooted in the way I approach every subject as an artist—constantly breaking down what I see into smaller pieces..."

—Megan Coyle

they don't work and you have to go back over an area. [This technique] also broadens my palette to include texture, pattern and fragments of photographs."

Despite working in the collage format, Megan admits that "you can see that influence from all those painting courses I took." She studied art as a child at The Art League, throughout high school, and later at Elon University where she double-majored in English and painting.

Megan acknowledges that there are different approaches to collage and painting. "But I'm merging together elements from the two different mediums," she says. "When I used to paint, I liked using distinct brushstrokes, so when you look at 'Couple by the Potomac,' for example, it looks like rectangular brushstrokes.... However, I'm not mixing my colors—I'm working with found pieces—with what's already created."

During her early art classes, an instructor advised Megan to pay attention to the details and focus on the shapes of colors that make up different planes rather than drawing objects or people as she saw them. That

practice is central to her work today: "I believe my attachment to collage is rooted in the way I approach every subject as an artist—constantly breaking down what I see into smaller pieces, piecing together each area bit by bit, occasionally stepping back to see the work in its entirety."

Megan is particularly excited about her solo show opening this month at The Art League Gallery in Alexandria. While her previous collages consisted primarily of close-up portraits, newer works such as "Leisure Day" and "Two's a Crowd" present more narrative scenes. "I wanted the figure to not necessarily be the focal point of the piece," says Megan. "There's a lot of background and there's a lot more going on besides the figures."

All of Megan's collages are based on photographs she takes. After sketching the piece on watercolor paper, she pulls out colors that might work from her magazine files. After gluing down the background, she moves on to the foreground and finishes the piece by sealing it with varnish.

Instead of attempting to mimic all the details of a



photograph, Megan uses it as a reference and breaks the image up into color, tone and shapes. "Sometimes I just make it up as I go along in certain areas depending on what colors and textures I find," she says. "I don't really look at the texture when I'm flipping through; I just look for colors." Even though the viewer might see grass, rocks and excerpts from printed photographs that are secondary to the color, Megan always tries to achieve a good balance of color and texture in the final composition.

Aside from portraits and figurative pieces, Megan has depicted cityscapes, landscapes, animals and still lifes. She also has produced a number of commissioned portraits of people and animal portraits as well as landscapes.

Regardless of her subject matter, Megan strives to create artwork that people can relate to. During a stint working in a gallery, she frequently witnessed a



disconnect between viewers who loved art but didn't understand the contemporary movement: "Visitors would come in and say, 'That's art?' I want people to be able to come up to my pieces and get something from them and not be confused. And by having a representational piece, the viewer can relate it to something that's going on in their own life or make up what they think is going on in a scene."

Megan's work is part of a group show through August 1 at Scene Gallery in Maryland's National Harbor. *Stories in Paper* is on view at The Art League Gallery, July 8 through August 2. And on August 1, Goodwin House Gallery in Alexandria opens a solo show of Megan's animal images. é

Megan Coyle
www.mcoyle.com

This page, top: "Street in Old Town," 9" x 12"; and "Penguin Feeding Time," 24" x 18"

Opposite: "Couple by the Potomac," 18" x 24"