

In fond remembrance of Camille Patha, an unstoppable force of color and creativity

Camille Patha was born Darlene Camille Taylor in Seattle in 1938. She often described herself with a laugh and a brilliant sparkle in her eye as a willful and terrible child. To keep her settled, her mother would give her paper, colored pencils, and crayons, knowing that Patha would stay still for hours, drawing and creating. For a year beginning in 1945, Patha was first introduced to art lessons at the Amelia Hart Art School for Children. Years later, she would take drawing lessons from Gail MacDonald and ceramic lessons with Harry Beaseley at West Seattle High School.

She married John Theodore Patha in 1955, and they relocated to the Phoenix area when John was assigned to service at Luke Air Force Base. Camille enrolled in the painting program at Arizona State University and started her long career as a painter. In Arizona, Patha contrasted her Seattle upbringing and recalled, "I saw the desert. I saw it in bloom. I saw sunshine. I saw hot, hot red. Hot yellows. I saw contrasts I never even dreamed of. I was 18 years old. I couldn't believe it. I began to paint." In 1959, John took a job at the Boeing Company as an aerospace engineer, and Camille transferred to the University of Washington and continued her studies in painting.

The transition back to Seattle at the University of Washington was challenging for Camille because she was expected to make art with a subdued, spiritual feeling like her professors and other iconic artists including Mark Tobey, Paul Horiuchi, and Morris Graves. She needed to reduce her color palette to soft browns and grays to garner the approval of the professors. She focused on developing a painting style that she labeled as "brushy brushwork style" and "slash and dash." She completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1960 and taught art at Chinook Junior High School until 1963 when she returned to the UW to earn a Master of Fine Arts degree. After navigating complex university politics and completing her degree requirements, Camille embraced her love of color. She recalled, "I didn't want to suppress my color, and my color began oozing out of my ears. Color came everywhere. Color came with the blacks. Color came with the blacks and whites. Color came with the soft blues. Color came with everything. And so I've always been a colorist. Color makes a statement about freedom, about humanity."

Camille found immediate success in the area's commercial galleries and museums. Her paintings were included in the Seattle Art Museum's *Northwest Annual* exhibitions in 1964, 1965, 1966, and 1968. Her paintings were selected for the Bellevue Art Museum's *Pacific Northwest Arts and Crafts Fair* in 1964, 1965, and 1968, winning honorable mention in 1964. She was represented by the Otto Seligman Gallery, the Gordon Woodside Gallery, and Davidson Contemporary.

The year 1970 was a pivotal point in her career as an artist. Her large-scale abstraction *Space Game* was featured in the Washington State Pavilion at the Osaka World's Fair, and her paintings were included in exhibitions at the Seattle Art Museum, the Bellevue Art Museum, and the Tacoma Art Museum. During this time, Camille signed her paintings "D. C. Patha" to hide her gender and allow people to assume that a man painted the visually strong works. She delighted

in telling about the moment she was unmasked by a gallery attendant who gasped, “You’re Patha? Oh my God, you’re a woman...but, you paint like a man.” To which Camille responded forcefully, “No, I don’t. I paint like a painter.”

Throughout her career, Patha embraced then discarded various styles and themes. For several years, she painted in the surrealist vein then settled into a strong feminist period. Camille then adopted a softer environmental focus sparked by her love of birds that would eventually result in various explorations of pure abstraction. Regardless of her style or theme, Camille distilled her personal experiences into aesthetic representations that would resonate powerfully with viewers if they looked closely and allowed Camille to guide their emotional responses through color, form, and textures.

In addition to innumerable private collections that notably included the Jon and Mary Shirley Collection, her paintings were also collected by the Boeing Company, Highline Medical Center, Seattle First National Bank, Pacific Northwest Bell Corporation, the Safeco Collection, the City of Normandy Park, the City of Des Moines, the University of Washington Campus Art Collection, the King County Art Collection, the Bellevue Art Museum, Tacoma Art Museum, the U.S. State Department’s “Art in Embassies” Program, and KNKX Public Radio. Camille would be featured in one-person exhibitions at the Bellevue Art Museum in 1979, the Museum of Northwest Art in La Connor in 2017, Pierce Colleges in 2019, and Tacoma Art Museum in 2014 and 2023. In 1990, Camille was commissioned by the Seattle Yacht Club to illustrate a cookbook, the Hilton Hotel in SeaTac for a series of prints for the guest rooms, and 13 Coins also in SeaTac for another series of prints that were displayed above the dining room booths. In addition to the publications produced by the Bellevue Arts Museum and Tacoma Art Museum, Camille would regularly self-publish major volumes of her paintings.

In the last three years of her career, Camille expanded her art practice to include furniture design and sculpture. Her last studio works focused intensely on female sexuality, unapologetically celebrating human sensuality from the perspective of an octogenarian. This body of work and her passionate desire to share it with the public led to a complicated conversation with Tacoma Art Museum. When the museum decided against including these works in the 2023 exhibition, Camille steeled her belief that she had made the most important group of artworks of her career and that the paintings and sculptures needed to be seen by the wider, more enlightened public.

Like her exuberant art, Camille was a flamboyant social presence. She commanded control of almost every room she entered. Camille and John hosted legendary parties throughout their lives, and Camille was widely admired as a generous and boisterous hostess. She specialized in a particularly strong version of a Manhattan, concocted with only ice cubes and Makers Mark bourbon and a cherry if there was one to be found.

Camille sought to befriend every person she encountered, looking to make a connection with them often through her art. She could coax a conversation with almost anyone and make them smile. During one particularly adventurous trip to New York in 2019, Camille fearlessly

approached the supermodel Adut Akech at a hotel bar and struck up a friendly conversation and by the end of their meeting, they hugged each other goodbye as though they were good friends.

Camille deeply loved animals, particularly birds. She and John rescued an injured crow sometime in the early 1980s, and they named it Crash because it kept flying into windows. Camille also once adopted a fancy chicken and named it Arturo Toscanini because the bird evoked the conductor's passionate command of the orchestra's sound. Camille was known in her Normandy Park neighborhood for tending to the wild animals, especially the hummingbirds and seagulls. She also kept generations of the neighborhood's raccoons and opossums well-fed and happy. Animals could imprint on Camille. After a trip to the Puyallup Fair, Camille would retell the details of the draught horses for years, emphasizing the magnificent form and size of the horses. Her only regret, which she also repeated for years, was that John would not let her keep a horse in their house!

In 1970, Camille and John would achieve a shared life-long dream with the purchase of a 1964 Stephens 50-foot wooden yacht. They would become lifetime members of the Seattle Yacht Club. John and Camille often sailed to attend the Port Townsend Jazz Festival and to their cabin on the Sunshine Coast in British Columbia.

Camille also had a life-long commitment to public service and served as a member of the King County Arts Commission, the Southwest King County Chamber of Commerce for more than ten years, and the Highline Medical Center Foundation (today the St. Anne Hospital Foundation). Camille was a long-standing member of the Rotary Club of Sea-Tac Tukwila, the Washington Athletic Club, and the Columbia Tower Club.

Camille's friends, fans, and associates will remember her love of neon-tinged oranges, yellows, fuchsias, and greens that spilled across her canvases and in her clothing choices. She will also be remembered for her charisma and powerful advocacy of her art and humanity.