

PG ARTIST INTERVIEW

Emily Hammerstad

This month, we are speaking with Emily Hammerstad, a dedicated and passionate member of the local fine arts community.

Over the years, Emily has initiated growing opportunities for kids and adults to explore their creative prowess in fine arts across a variety of mediums. Learn more about how her journey led to the creation of the US and ART studio, which is located on historic Pleasant Grove Main street.

Where are you from, Emily?

I was born and raised right here in Pleasant Grove. In fact, I went to Pleasant Grove Junior High and I graduated from Pleasant Grove High School. Even my Parents Garth and Ruby Fielding are still here, in the same house I grew up in.

What are some of your earliest memories of the arts?

I was a huge fan of Bob Ross. And I didn't watch him because it was the only thing on, I watched because I loved it! I loved his personality and how he connected with people in general. I loved watching the artwork come to life from a blank canvas to a masterpiece. I also loved his pet squirrels named Peeped. The whole show was awesome. My oldest brother bought me a Bob Ross paint set, and I was thrilled. I began learning how to oil paint. I painted many masterpieces with my first paint set, up until my paint tubes were squeezed clean. I deeply connect with the process and experience of painting,

Another early memory of the arts in my life was back in sixth grade. There was a lot of buzz around the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, and the olympic commission was holding an art contest for the community to create an olympic mascot. I eagerly jumped right in. My mascot was based on a Greek Goddess, with a flowing cape, a sword, and electricity surrounding her. I named her Electra. I spent a significant time drawing that character. I even stayed in during recess to work on it several



times. I was extremely proud of the submission at the time, but turns out, everyone else was drawing fluffy animals and cute characters. You may remember the winning submissions - a cute bear, bunny and fox that had mittens, ski passes and other snow gear. Looking back now, my submission was so silly! I'm still proud that I made the submission.

Where did the arts take you as you grew up?

Over time, my interests in the arts expanded. In Junior High I latched on to Theater and performing arts, where I was involved in a number of plays and musical productions. I love to act, and I really love to sing. I continued my interest in performing arts into High School, where I was given lead parts in a few productions, such as Elizabeth Proctor in *Crucible*. I love how everything else melts away on stage. All cares, all worries, all problems fade.

I continued performing arts in College. One of my most memorable experiences was playing Mary Poppins. It was incredible. Since that time, I've taken classes from The Hale Theater to continue learning performing arts, and I've also been involved in their mini concert series. It's been a wonderful adventure that I still enjoy today.

Did you also continue in fine arts at the same time?

I did. Both in Junior High with Miss Beatty (I bet a lot of people from here remember her) and in High School. During my AP Art Class in High school, I was fixated on lava lamps. I absolutely loved them! They were mesmerizing, colorful, flowing and free. I would create lava lamps in different scene settings with flowing words inside each lamp that matched the setting through various art mediums. Prints, paintings, acrylic, watercolor, you name it. My teacher didn't like it. He told me that if I only focused on that one theme, I wouldn't receive class credit towards the college side of the class. He felt that I needed to expand to a broader experience. If only I had known that one day people would be selling stickers all over the place that looked exactly like my art.

Where did you go from there?

Over time, I got married and became focused on my family. Every craft project and painting became about them and connecting with my kids. I became PTA president and used all my crafting skills to run Carnivals, field days and anything else I could. When all of my kids started school Full time, I began struggling with depression. It was a hard time for me and I wanted to get grounded again. My husband, who is my greatest support, suggested that I find a new hobby. I jokingly suggested that I start a studio and call it Unicorns sprinkles and Art. He replied, "Why not?" and that's where it all started.

I invited neighborhood kids over and we would do art projects around my kitchen counter. And it all began to grow from there. In fact, it snowballed pretty hard - once people knew about the courses that I was offering, we began to fill every course to capacity. I kept the name Unicorns Sprinkles and Art, which I felt brought a fun, energetic vibe to what we were trying to accomplish. There was so much interest in the community for children to actively participate in the arts, and we were grateful for the opportunities that it brought to us. In fact,

my husband and I were exploring an opportunity to purchase a building where we could expand our courses. After a lot of time and consideration, this opportunity fell apart - which turned out to be a huge blessing for us.

In the Spring of 2020, COVID changed everything. We ran our courses online for a bit but eventually closed our doors. Students and parents continued to reach out asking when we would open again. After a while, I had a BYU student reach out to me. She had seen my business website, saw all that I was doing, and she wanted to be a part of it. It felt like another sign that I needed to open the studio again. Summer 2021 we opened our doors back up and had over 70 participants in our courses! It was such a massive expansion. As we expanded, so did the number of cars lining the street to pick up the students after their art classes. I am thankful we have such great neighbors!

It looks like you've found a place in the community now?

We absolutely have. After reopening our doors and taking over my basement apartment, I went back to looking for buildings again. It felt very fruitless at times but one day, I was driving home from a meeting one day, and for some reason felt an impression that I should drive down Pleasant Grove main street - which is not the normal way I drive home. I saw a

building with a "For Lease" sign in the window and I immediately knew that this was our studio. I called the number right away and the pieces began falling together better than I could have imagined.

In April 2022, we started our lease, built out the studio space, and US and ART ("unicorn sprinkles") finally made it out of the basement!! The community came out in droves to support us. Our first semester was filled with 185 students! Our students came from all over Utah County (and in some cases beyond) - from Spanish Fork to Draper. It has been amazing to see the interest.



What do your art classes look like?

We offer 9 and 12 week courses with a heavy focus on creativity. We have both kid and Adult classes and are introducing new classes whenever we can. All our courses are repeatable; each semester we have different themes and techniques so that students can enroll again and again and have new experiences each time. Right now we have combination classes and a few special interest classes like drawing, watercolor and Acrylic painting. Besides our courses we also offer: corporate events, paint nights, birthday parties, day camps, private lessons, and much more. We even have a preschool.

My personal favorite, our Elite's class, is an advanced class for kids 10-17 years old. We travel as part of this class. This year our Elite team has been accepted by Disney Imagineering campus, where we will participate in a workshop designed for Artists. We are so excited for this new, unique opportunity for our students!

How does art affect our children and communities?

I think it is important to remember that we need this outlet. All of us. With covid and everything else we continue to face we need creative outlets and safe places to heal. I keep seeing the art programs being dropped from schools and I wish that wasn't the case. Though I am glad that I am able to provide an alternative option for those students who desperately need it.

Art and creativity have so many benefits. Art has been proven to reduce anxiety, as well as improve educational aptitude in math, reading, test scores, and more. Art can be a healing opportunity. It can help everyone to connect, bond, break through shyness, and discover who they are. I am a strong believer that art can change lives and improve our relationships not only with others, but with our own self.

Where can people learn more about US and ART?

You can visit our website or visit us in person at our GALA. Our Spring Gala will be held on April 22nd, 2023 at the US and ART studio. This is a FREE event where we celebrate our students, their growth and their artistic creations. We invite families, friends and the community to come celebrate the accomplishments of our students and see how art can make a positive impact on our lives.

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