





Left : Parallelogram 60x84  
Below : Bibby in her studio at IBC Art

# BIBBY GIGNILLIAT



**Bibby Gignilliat** is a self-taught mixed media artist, based in California. She creates large-scale artworks that have the rawness and immediacy of street art coupled with a sophisticated eye for abstraction, colour, space and texture.



Left : Beacon of Light 48x48

Right : Bloom 48x48

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**Hi Bibby, I've done a little bit of reading on your website and a few articles I've found, and one of the things that fascinated me is that, before you got into collage full-time, you had a cooking business.**

I did. I had a hands-on cooking party business that was used primarily for corporate team building events. Groups would come and we would give a lively interactive demo, showing them tips and tricks about cooking and then we'd break the group into teams and then they'd cook their meal under our guidance, then sit down and enjoy the fruits of their labour. We used to say that food is the universal language and that food brings people together. Although, I've found that art brings people together as well.

**So, what facilitated the move into the art?**

I was doing the cooking business for twenty years and what I love is launching businesses and growing them. I was running the day-to-day but I'm better at the vision and creativity of the start-up aspect. Once it was running, there was a lot of stress in terms of managing a lot of people. When you're dealing with a business like that you may have all your ducks lined up, like we may have done a perfect party rental order but then the rental company may make a mistake and those sorts of things created a lot of stress. There were so many moving parts. I grew tired of the management, so I was trying to figure out what the next thing would be. I've said on my website that I painted at age ten, then had a critical teacher and became a

perfectionist, so it was in the back of my mind the whole time. I had this dream of having this gallery show. When I was trying to figure out what to do I did two things: I went to the Academy of Intuition Medicine to study energy work and I took a painting class with a man named Nick Wilton.

I was literally the worst one in the class, but I had determination, so I got a space in this building, one hundred square feet. At first, I felt like an imposter but I just kept showing up. Then about six months after that class I found Michael Cutlip who is a collage artist and I realised I needed to paint with paper and that's why, in part, I wasn't getting it.

Circling back to your original question, I started painting for about three years and I was having some success selling my work. I went into a slightly larger studio and I felt like I had enough success that I was able to leave. I sold my company and I just love now being the CEO of me and not having to worry about all those moving parts. Eventually I moved into what's now a fifteen hundred square foot studio in ICB Art. I keep the front as a showroom and the back is where I offer my workshops. I teach pretty regularly out of my studio and I have an online class too.

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## Here She Is

60x60

Last summer, I took a drawing class at the Anderson Ranch. It was a total challenge, especially because it was very technical. We were drawing on a grid. I was the worst one in the class. I have spent much of my life trying to be perfect, it turns out...I'm human. It has taken me a lifetime to accept this. While I left the ranch feeling discouraged, something started percolating. The next day, I woke up and realised the big takeaway: I draw from the heart. It is abstract and childlike. I asked myself, what would happen if I leaned into it?





Left : Colima CDMX 60x60

**You have a very distinctive style. How quickly did your approach emerge? It ploughs a particular furrow in terms of found materials and mixed media...**

I studied with a lot of different teachers and kind of gave myself a degree in art because I'm self-taught. There were a couple of teachers that I studied with along the way and I have basically grabbed elements from each of them, then added my own and put them all together (almost like a recipe), so I have a couple different styles. Texture is my thing, I just love texture. I have some aspects of my art that are deeply textured but they're more refined. Then I have the work that is more graphic and graffiti like. I'm still exploring. As you know, a scrap can inspire a whole piece.

**Absolutely. Looking at your work you seem to me to be someone who absolutely revels in the production of the art. There seems to be a kind of exuberance that comes through in your art. Is that an accurate observation?**

Oh, very so much. It just sparks so much joy in me to create. I'm just so grateful to be able to do art. You get that.

**Yes, absolutely. I read on *Conversations With Artists*, one of the questions you were asked was "Do you have any quotes from other artists that have inspired you?" And if I'm right in saying, there was one quote that goes something like, "There are not creative people and non-creative people, there are only people who don't use their creativity."**

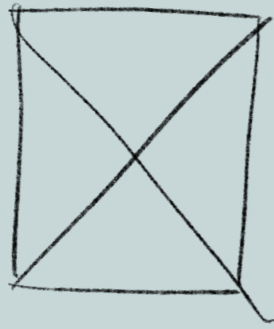
Yes, it's a Brené Brown quote. "There is no such thing as creative people and non-creative people. There are just people who use their creativity and those who don't. And not using it doesn't go without penalty. As it turns out, unused creativity is not benign, it's dangerous."

**Obviously there was creativity within the cooking business but do you feel that you're now actually fully utilising the creative side of yourself?**

That's a great point. I've always had a lot of dinner parties, I love decorating and obviously cooking, but this, to me, is the most challenging aspect of those creative endeavours. This one is harder and it's so personal. It's the one that feeds my soul the most.



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Right : Lyrical 72x83

**In terms of the works you make, are they pure expressions of you working with the material – the textures, the image, the typography – or are there messages within the works as well? Are there things that you're trying to convey from the pieces you make?**

A lot of it is unconscious but there are some pieces where I'm very consciously creating. I've been trying to figure out why I have this fascination with layers and texture because every piece of mine usually starts with a solid layer of collage and then, more often than not I'll cover almost all of it with a trowel, leaving just little windows available. Then I start my design on top after sanding. They have this rich, deep texture. I've been on a spiritual journey myself, letting go of societal and family programming and underneath it all is the true essence of who I am and I think it's mirrored in my work. In each piece there's a lot of depth, but then there's the layers, just like people. We're like onions, you peel back the layers and you get to the core and I think that's very reflective in my work.

**You mentioned earlier on that you like creating businesses. Clearly, on top of your work, you've obviously got an art business going in terms of the workshops and the courses and other stuff you do. Was that part of the plan from the start?**

I'll answer that in two parts. The first part about the business, it's like most artists don't want to do the business. What I want to say to that is: *everybody has to learn*. If you want to be a successful artist, I think you have to do the business. Just like if you want to be fit you may have to run or do some kind of exercise. It's the same thing. I knew that I had to make

a living as an artist and either sell a lot of art or offer some classes or both. And that's what I've done. When I moved into this big space my rent sky-rocketed, so I knew I was going to have to teach in order to stay in this space.

I ran into Nick Wilton one day and I said, "*Oh I'm not ready to teach but I have to teach in order to afford this space.*" And he said, "*Well, start before you're ready.*" So I just did a mock class for some friends in the building, they gave me feedback and then I just did it. I've been offering these classes for five years and every single one of them with the exception of one has been full. It pays my rent and it allows me to relax and not have to worry about selling as much, although I do sell a lot.

I never had any intention of doing an online class but covid hit and my income went away. I was having a great year and suddenly, we were in a pandemic with no income, I was kind of freaking out. I was forced to do an online class and it's been incredible because I still have this passive income stream. Yesterday I was teaching and like, four people signed up for my online class. So I'm making income without trying.

**Income while you sleep. So that's pre-recorded videos is it?**

Yes, it's a self-paced, self-study course and it mimics my one day course and people can watch it as many times as they want. There's twenty small bite-sized modules in it. People don't have a very strong attention span that they do on their own. Then there's a Facebook group where they can come and show their work and I can comment on it. It's been great for people that live all over the world.



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Left : Dirty Martini 24x24



**When you fully turned to art, how easy did you find breaking into the commercial side of things in terms of gallery shows and selling your work? A lot of the people that I interview say that's the most difficult thing for them. They produce a lot of work but don't get the sales from it.**

This building that I'm in has 180 working artists and we do open studios four times a year. Two where we dress up smart and two where we're working and people can come and learn about our process. I've had a lot of success at open studios but I also sell my work at the end of my classes. I offer my students a 'Friends and Family' discount for taking my class.

Instagram has been amazing in terms of getting students and selling art, then the galleries have come later. I started out getting into a few interior design showrooms in the area. My goal this year is to reach out to more galleries. One of the best ways to get into a gallery is when someone recommends you. I got into a gallery through a friend in the building who is in the same gallery. They've been amazing. They're in Portland, Maine, so all the way across the country. I think last year they sold thirty pieces, so it's really helped me.

If someone were to ask me about the most challenging aspect for me right now, I would say two things: I'm very prolific and so I do get anxious when I have too much work in my studio that hasn't sold. You can't predict the cash flow of an artist. I've had a lot of class sales this month but who knows what next month will be? That's how it is, unlike my company where I could always count on getting a monthly pay check, but I can't always count on that with art.

Top Right : Marrakesh 48x80

Bottom Right : Electric Zen 60x72



Right before we went to dinner we came upon this wall that had incredible scraps. I pulled them all down and carried them to dinner with me in a big wad. When I got back to my hotel I realised that I'd have to leave some clothes behind because I couldn't get them all in my suitcase.

**I guess that's the trade off, isn't it? Perhaps a job that's more predictable in terms of just doing the job, but where the excitement and creativity is not as high.**

I don't mind the risk because when I think about it, I wouldn't trade it for the world.

**What about your materials, Bibby?**

I'm reading that Rick Ruben book, *The Creative Act*. It's such a good book and he nails something that I do, but I could be doing more. And that is, everywhere you go, just be looking. If you're in a restaurant and the menu's interesting, steal it. I find a lot of my scraps on the street and in odd ways. I was in Italy on an art residency, I went to a flea market and found some incredible scraps there – old Italian scraps.

I was in Mexico City last February for the *Zonamaco* show which is probably the biggest Latin-American international show and I highly recommend it. A group of us artists were having dinner in the Roma Norte district. Right before we went to dinner we came upon this wall that had incredible scraps. I pulled them all down and carried them to dinner with me in a big wad. When I got back to my hotel I realised that I'd have to leave some clothes

behind because I couldn't get them all in my suitcase. My friends took some stuff home and I got all of the scraps into a suitcase and created fifteen pieces. I posted a reel on Instagram where I'm in the act of stealing. Anyway, fast forward and a guy came up to me at my recent open studios and said, "*Hello, I'm from the Mexico City Police Department and I'm here to arrest you for stealing the scraps.*" That's one of my favourite stories.

**I have similar experiences. I, too, walk around the city and peel stuff off the walls and get very excited when I find something that immediately start thinking about what I do could with it?**

Have you ever gotten in trouble for stealing?

**No, I've had a few funny looks and I've had one or two people ask me what I'm doing because generally you're ripping down things that were posted illegally anyway. A lot of the time you can justify it. I have a rule to myself that if there's a particular poster up on a wall where the event being promoted hasn't yet happened, then I won't take it down.**

Oh that's a good rule. I like it.







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IN THEIR OWN WORDS

## La Vida Nocturna (The Night Life)

84x60

One night on a recent trip to Mexico City, I foraged these scraps from a boarded up building in Roma Norte. I filled a whole suitcase with them, leaving behind clothes and getting friends to bring home the rest of my belongings so that I could bring this gold home! See my [Instagram reel](#) capturing the live steal. This piece, captures the essence of the night life in Mexico City.

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CHASE CENTER



Previous page : Be One 60x84

Left : Carnival 60x72



I got home that night and there was a cigarette butt on my kitchen floor and I'm like, oh my god, someone's been in my house.

I was in New York City a year ago for a class and I found a big heap of scraps on the street, like on the ground. Somebody had already taken them down and there was an Amazon box next to it so I just put the scraps in the box. My friend was mortified. I ran them back to my motel and just put the whole heap into one of those plastic laundry bags, you know, that the hotel has and I brought them home. When I got home, I took the materials out of the laundry bag and put the whole wad in my bag to bring to work. I got home that night and there was a cigarette butt on my kitchen floor and I was like, 'Oh my god, someone's been in my house'. Eventually I put two and two together to realise that it was from the heap of scraps. I did actually end up finding a few more cigarette butts and a coffee cup that had been in that mix of junk. But anyway, it made for great scraps.

**I suppose you've got to be fairly prepared to get your hands dirty, haven't you?**

Oh totally. I forage for the scraps, then I come home and I will soak them, separate them and air dry them and get them ready for storage.

**So, where's next, Bibby? What are your hopes for 2024?**

Artistically, I'm in a big experimental mode. I was home for the holidays in Chicago and I went to a bunch of museums, watched a lot

of videos and went to some galleries - I was super inspired. I hadn't had a lot of downtime to do that last year, it was busy. I'm starting to work with plaster and doing some wall sculptures. I'm also getting more involved with joint compound, because again, it's about deepening the whole texture aspect of things.

I'm creating really textured Gelli plate prints that I'm incorporating into my work. What's lovely about that is I felt stuck towards the end of last year, just not in a place of growth, so I was ready to try experimenting with some new things and I now feel like I'm on the right track. I don't know what the work will end up looking like, but I'm really excited about it.

Business-wise I'm planning on approaching some galleries. I launched a new totem class because totems are a big part of my work. I use a lot of the scraps I find on the walls with the big text and also create my own scraps with the totems. They're 72 x 9 x 3 and it's one of my most popular selling items. The class has sold out with a waiting list already. And the other fun thing I'm thinking of doing is going to Europe for an artist residency.

**Where will that be?**

I'm hoping it will be in Spain. I have a friend over there and she might be able to organise it for me.

You can see more of Bibby's work at : [www.bibbyart.com](http://www.bibbyart.com) and on her IG page: [@bibbygart](https://www.instagram.com/bibbygart)