

The healing power of art: New exhibit's creator examines healthy expression

[Rhonda Siebecker](#) | [News Republic](#)



The latest featured artist at downtown Baraboo's Con Amici Wine Bar views art

The latest featured artist at downtown Baraboo's Con Amici Wine Bar views art not as a product or destination, but as a healing journey.

Cathy Lawson, of Madison, said she grew up in an artistic household.

"My mother made handmade dolls in several mediums and my father is a wood carver," she said. That environment taught her about art as a never-ending way of life.

She said 20 years ago, she was drawn to a bead store in Baraboo, where she ended up working as an instructor. "I love doing art," she said. "But, even more than doing and selling it, I love teaching."

That love of teaching helped her connect with people, sharing her philosophy of using art as a tool for relaxation, as an active meditation or just for fun.

"Doodling can be used to relax and collage is a self-discovery tool," she said. "People can find a renewed purpose in life. It's a healthy outlet."

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The healing power of creating art became apparent to Lawson during a time of personal crisis.

"About 10 years ago, my life was turned upside down and all that I built my identity around changed in a span of six months," she said. "I was very lost."

She said she turned to art, creating an altered book from magazine pictures.

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"I painted, cut, and glued for several months, all the while creating a comforting space for myself to process what my new life would look like," she said. "It was through this process that I discovered my hidden desire to go to college for art

therapy because art has always helped me.”

She chose to go back to school and during her sophomore year was diagnosed with multiple myeloma cancer.

“This led to a very interesting learning experience,” she said. “I was able to channel my pain, anxiety, and confusion about this cancer ‘thing’ into my projects in my art classes.”

One of those projects took two years to complete. That multi-media painting represents her journey through cancer and healing and is on display at Con Amici. She designed her own internship at UW Hospitals and Clinics in the Carbone Cancer Center working with the artist in residence there. “I did art with patients receiving chemotherapy treatments and in the waiting rooms,” she said.

The patients accepted the art time as joyful and freeing, she said. “You carry a lot of stuff inside and sometimes you’re scared to face them,” she said. “Through art, you get it out, you look at it in a way that’s not really scary.”

The wine bar features a different artist each month.

“Cathy is one of the bravest people I know,” Con Amici owner Laura Hamdan-Krause Hamdan-Krause said. “The way she was able to handle her personal battle was truly inspiring. She’s a talented artist and a wonderful person.”

Lawson was a classmate with Hamdan-Krause, making the display particularly special for the establishment owner.

A reception will be held starting at 6:30 p.m. Oct. 10 at Con Amici, 126 3rd St. Some pieces will be for sale, ranging from \$50 to \$150.

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The final paragraph of Lawson’s online biography, at www.yourinnerart.com, sums up her views on art and life.

“Making art is messy, fun, and forces us to make creative decisions that come from our inner wisdom,” she states. “If we practice listening to our inner wisdom through art, then we can listen when it comes to other parts of our lives.”