

Of Meadows and Blue Skies

Q&A with Melody Money



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Artwork on Display

Rain
Field Studies
Blue Sky Theory
Meadow 1 and Meadow 2
(Diptych)
The Moment in Between
Pieces of Sky
Chant
Sky Prayers - Between the
Sun and the Moon
Tall Grass Daydreams
Swallows in Flight

What was your route to becoming an artist?

I can always remember drawing, starting from a very young age. I remember being very excited to discover that I could make my own colors by mixing crayons. I painted en plein air with my father. My grandmother quilted and helped me to start my first quilt. She encouraged my unusual color choice for a wine red cathedral window quilt.

I went to college at The University of Colorado as a fine arts major. I studied general courses of drawing, painting, sculpture, and color theory before I settled into silk screen as my choice of medium. After my college studies, I studied at the Schaeffer School of Design in San Francisco. The director, Mr. Schaeffer, was a Bauhaus-trained artist with an Asian aesthetic. The students were required to take drawing, composition, design, and color theory every year. The one other required class was flower arranging, which we all came to love. We would go to the flower market at 5 am to pick the flowers for the week. My teacher for this class was a practitioner of Zen Buddhism. He required us to dress in black for his class in order to become egoless. The arrangements were Ikebana-style -- sparse and simple. It forced us to strip the design elements down to line, movement, color, and dimensionality.

After graduation, I worked as a graphic artist and eventually taught art to grades K-3. I rediscovered textiles when my children were young and made them both quilts. When I discovered that I could paint on fabric, I felt I was finally home. It was a way to merge my interests in fabric design, color, quilting, and painting. Art quilts have given me the opportunity to play with fabric in a new way outside the confines of traditional quilting.

Tell us about your chosen techniques.

For me, it's the details that capture my interest -- the more tiny and complicated elements to come together to form a whole, the better. I work in different techniques, but all involve many, many details.

The wrapped thread pieces come together slowly. The threads are hand-wrapped and plied using mostly embroidery thread as the base. There are thousands of hand-wrapped threads of 6-12 inches each in every piece. I wrap them with a mind to value, forming a base of dark, medium, and light colors. The variation of color possibilities gives me great control over the final color composition and the proportion of the piece. They are hand-couched on a background piece of fabric.

The grasses pieces are constructed of hand-dyed silk, which is pleated and heat set. Then I painstakingly embroider the grasses, blade by blade. These are very meditative pieces. They often take months to complete.

Q&A with Melody Money - continued

The sari ribbon pieces with the prairie points are a way to play with color and gradation.

Most of my pieces have a hand-painted surface design component.

I also like to add beads to some of my pieces. These are sewn on bead-by-bead using buttons, sequins, and crystals as a base form. I like to take a technique usually worked in smaller pieces and expand it to a much larger scale.

Do you use a sketchbook?

I am rarely without a sketchbook. I draw constantly. I find it useful to always have one near to note passing thoughts or inspiration. I make notations of color and scale to remind myself at a later date what my mind's eye saw. The sketches always change in the finished piece, some more than others, but it is always a good place to start. It also helps when I am looking towards the next piece. I have sketchbooks full of possibilities. I never seem to run out of inspiration; there is always something there to spark a new plan. When I start redrawing the same piece over and over, I know it's time to start that piece.

What advice would you give an aspiring textile artist?

When I worked with very young children teaching art, I found it helpful to talk about happy accidents. The children were visually sophisticated and had a firm idea of how their art should look. The fun part was when that vision could be stretched to make that mistake something wonderful.

I think it is so important to play and experiment without any thought of result. There is a quote, "Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn." It's important to find your own voice, to find what's important to you to express. Experiment to find your own style. Don't be afraid to try something new.

In art school, we often went to museums to copy masterpieces. It gives you an intimate knowledge of the design elements, line, and composition. Go often to museums and galleries and explore why certain pieces speak to you. Then just play and see what happens.

What tool could you not live without?

I couldn't live without a needle. So much of my work is hand embroidery. I find the slow, meticulous, thoughtful stitching to be so satisfying. My embroidery stitches become needle drawings. I can keep control of the design and see it coming together slowly. My mind has time to evaluate the color choices. I find embroidery to be a calming and mindful opportunity to become part of the piece.