

MELANIE MILLER-SILVER

2023 ART AND ART HISTORY MFA THESIS EXHIBITION



DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

May 9 – May 20, 2023

2023 ART AND ART HISTORY MFA THESIS EXHIBITION

The *2023 Art and Art History MFA Thesis Exhibition* presents the graduate thesis exhibitions of Young Kim, Ryan Lucas, and Melanie Miller-Silver in Columbia College Chicago's Art and Art History Department.

Young Kim presents *Shall We Go to The Happy Land?* is an immersive installation and performance that materializes a sanctuary where audiences experience comfort, serenity, transcendence, hope, or a moment of respite.

Ryan Lucas examines the ideas and perspectives of popular societal views of masculinity in *Our Sins and Where They Take Us*, through a sculpture and a series of paintings.

Melanie Miller-Silver exhibits *Women and the Invisible Labors of Ritual*, a series of ritual regalia incorporating beadwork designs common to many cultures around the world.

The *2023 Art and Art History MFA Thesis Exhibition* is presented in conjunction with the Department of Exhibitions, Performance, and Student Spaces (DEPS), the Department of Art and Art History, and Paul Catanese, Director of Graduate Studies for Art and Art History.

MELANIE MILLER-SILVER

My artwork is something many people call craft. I take an atypical medium: glass seed beads, and “paint” a world in glass, thread, and my imagination. I like to showcase designs of nature and abstract images that capture the essence of a way of life that is meaningful and shows how we as human beings from different parts of the world can create similar works of art. As my medium, beads give me an opportunity to reach as many people as there are types of beads and I hope we can find a common ground.

Melanie Miller-Silver is a born and raised Chicagoan. She received her first BA from Northeastern Illinois University in Graphic Design and second BA from Columbia College Chicago in Advertising Art Direction. She will receive her MFA in Fine Art from Columbia College Chicago in May 2023. Melanie uses beadwork as her primary medium to illustrate beadwork as an art. Her works are in the permanent collections of the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio and the Museum of Beadwork in Portland, Maine. Melanie is a married mom of two, living in the Chicago suburbs.



Tree of Life Regalia, 2023, denim duster jacket, glass seed beads and resin leaves, Fireline fishing line thread, 60" long, size extra large. Photo By Hillary Johnson



Tree of Life Regalia, 2023, denim duster jacket, glass seed beads and resin leaves, Fireline fishing line thread, 60" long, size extra large. Photo By Hillary Johnson



Tree of Life Regalia, 2023, denim duster jacket, glass seed beads and resin leaves, Fireline fishing line thread, 60" long, size extra large. Photo By Hillary Johnson



Walking Staff and Tree of Life Regalia, 2023, red willow, deer hide, glass seed beads, resin leaves, brass bell, bird feathers, 40" x 2" diameter. Photo By Hillary Johnson



Walking Staff and Tree of Life Regalia, 2023, red willow, deer hide, glass seed beads, resin leaves, brass bell, bird feathers, 40" x 2" diameter. Photo By Hillary Johnson



Walking Staff and Tree of Life Regalia, 2023. red willow, deer hide, glass seed beads, resin leaves, brass bell, bird feathers, 40" x 2" diameter. Photo By Hillary Johnson



Talking Stick, 2023, red willow, deer hide, glass seed beads, resin leaves, brass bell, bird feathers, 12" x 2" diameter. Photo By Hillary Johnson



*Headpiece, 2023, copper tubing, pastel rainbow ribbon, floral wire, glass seed beads, handmade glass artisan beads (artisan beads courtesy of Sheila Falk-Papaioannou), 22" x ½" diameter copper tubing.
Photo By Hillary Johnson*

INTERVIEW WITH MELANIE MILLER-SILVER

Conducted by Cecilia L. Vargas

Cecilia L. Vargas: What first intrigued you about the cultures you represent in your craft? How do you research the societies you choose to base your art on, and how do you ensure that your art is correct and respectful?

Melanie Miller-Silver: Since my medium of beads is one used by many cultures around the world, I saw the cultures that surrounded me and how they used the same medium. As a non-Indigenous person, I wanted to compare, contrast, and assess how many cultures use the same medium and if anything, such as pattern, use of color and meaning are similar.

Growing up in Chicago, I lived near the American Indian Center and frequented a small store that sold beads and supplies that was owned by a local Indigenous family. I learned a great deal about how they used beads in their ritual and everyday garments and jewelry.

When I was growing up, many people still wore beads, and they were very popular, and my mom would make small items as well. I would make small things for myself and to share with friends. So, I was surrounded by people who made things out of beads.

How I do my research first is, personal experience, I run two beadwork guilds, The NW Suburban Beadwork Guild, and the NW Indiana Beadwork Guild. We share ideas, patterns, and our work. I also have subscribed to many magazines over the years, many of which are no longer in business. I have beadwork in the permanent collections of the Museum of Beadwork in Portland ME and the Toledo Ohio Museum of Art.

I attend Powwows, art shows, and many other gatherings where beadwork artists exhibit and sell their work. My extensive library of beadwork books and magazines, both

scholarly and directed at the mainstream beadworker keeps my knowledge fresh and up to date.

CV: Why do you think the artwork you incorporate in your pieces are mostly created by women? What messages do you hope to express towards your audience by using symbols made by women from varying areas of the world?

MS: Art/craft around the world is in many cultures considered women's work. Women use what they create to support their families whether or not they have a male figure in the picture. Beadwork in particular is sold at markets to tourists looking for a souvenir of their travels and applied to ritual wear and everyday wear used by both men and women. In some African countries, a woman's beadwork shows her skill and status within the community and in Eastern Europe it shows a woman's skill and the ability to concentrate on the fine work needed. I hope to show humans, no matter the location, beliefs, or skill level use similar designs and colors to create beautiful work.

CV: Since you use imagery of nature and abstract designs to showcase how distinct individuals can make similar art, what artists or styles do you find your art most closely relates to? What creators do you pull inspiration from and hope to make similar art as, and how do you differ from them?

MS: There are many people whom I draw inspiration from. Beadwork artists such as Nastasiya Marusyk, from the Bukovyna region of Ukraine, whose work in many ways I take influence from. The colors and designs she uses to represent nature I can see how similar her Eastern European beadwork is to beadwork from a place like Guerrero, Mexico, or Indigenous beadwork from North Dakota.

INTERVIEW CONTINUED

Liza Lou, whose work, "Kitchen" is an entire beaded kitchen. She takes the everyday and makes it unique. Also, the many Indigenous beadwork artists from the many cultures around the world influence me. When I make my work, it is all my own patterns, ideas, and designs, but of course like any artist, we all see how others use what they do to illustrate their ideas. I like to hope my work builds upon that vision that has been taken up by every artist, no matter the medium.

CV: How has working with an unconventional medium impacted your aesthetic and artmaking process? When did you first start experimenting with glass seed beads, and why did you choose to make them a staple in your craft?

MS: I think working with an unconventional medium makes me think outside the box, inside the box and take that box and toss it aside and make my own box out of beads. Beads are definitely a unique medium to use for art. I can use clothing as a foundation or make jewelry, or even create a beaded painting. I love the tactile sensation beads create as well as the visual impact.

I began to experiment with beads as a child when they were not as available nor in as many colors or styles as we can get today. Over many years new colors, shapes and sizes of beads have been manufactured by different companies that are very diverse. Countries such as the Czech Republic, India, China, Japan, Italy and to a lesser extent other places manufacture beads that are used by bead workers around the world. I chose to make them my primary medium because they can be turned into just about anything I can dream of. I can do three-dimensional work or flat pieces without needing much space or expensive supplies. I teach beadworking through my guilds and people don't need a lot to learn how

to do this. Beads are shareable and come in every color of the rainbow. Like people I see the beauty and creativity in this interesting and versatile medium.



THE DEPS ARTIST PROFILE SERIES

The DEPS Artist Profile Series presented by Columbia College Chicago's Department of Exhibitions, Performance and Student Spaces (DEPS), is a virtual publication on select artists involved with the DEPS Galleries and the Columbia College Chicago community. Our goal with this series is to connect artist and viewer on a deeper level, and to highlight the amazing works and thoughts of our featured artists through interviews, artist biographies, and catalogs of work. Art has always been a way to connect with others, no matter where one may physically be. We hope by presenting the creativity and insights of the people involved in the DEPS Artist Profile Series that viewers may have one more way to stay in touch with and support the arts community. The DEPS Artist Profile Series is managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Rachel Manlubatan and Sierra Delamarter. Graphic design is also managed by DEPS Exhibitions Assistant Rachel Manlubatan. This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

Learn more at: colum.edu/deps

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