

THE LIFE BEHIND THE ARTIST

Spurred by my art quilt, *Desert Wind: Circles*, going on display at the upcoming SAQA exhibition, *Primal Forces: Wind*, at the National Quilt Museum in Paducah, KY in August 2023, my daughter, Sofia, interviewed me to know more about the work I do, who I am as an artist, and more importantly, who I am as a person. This is an excerpt from her interview with me, with a few of her favorite questions and my answers. (Edited for clarity & length.)

(Sofia) Tell me: what are a few of your favorite things?

(Mara) Well, my favorite things are pretty well known. My favorite animal is any fox, my favorite color is orange, my favorite flower is the sunflower, my favorite landscape is the desert, my favorite foods are chicken, potatoes, and tomatoes, my favorite cuisine is New Mexican. I think a better question would be: what is my third favorite animal, color, flower? Haha!



Desert Wind: Circles (2019)

OK! So, what are your favorite third animal, color, and flower?

Let's see. Animal would be a crocodile or alligator. Color? Maybe green? I have a hard time working with it in the studio, but I like seeing it in nature, especially in the desert. And flower? I think maybe zinnias. A bit like sunflowers, I suppose.

You have a category in your newsletter called "Quiltations". They are very philosophical or meditative. Do you have a favorite?

I don't know if I can pick a favorite off the top of my head, or even at all. I suppose they are all of equal value to me, which is why I select those in particular. But one that stands out is "age quod agis," or "do what you are doing." It's all about just being in the present moment and staying on the task at hand. It's a very grounding statement and I use it a lot.

Why are so many of your posts philosophical and psychological in nature? Why don't you just talk about the art-making process, like making more how-to videos?

Because from everything I have ever studied, read, and learned in life, human beings are a combination of physical and psychological. Each influences the other. What we think impacts how we act and behave, and how we treat others. How we treat others has consequences that we internalize. What we internalize becomes who we are. And the cycle continues. That's the greatest puzzle I like to study and analyze. And I do that through my art, and apparently in my social media posts, too!

Who have been some of your most influential artists?

Any artist whose work has to do with "freedom of being". I've made some pieces that draw on the work of specific artists, such as Rothko, Christo, Hambling, or Van Gogh. And then there are the musicians and composers: Beethoven has been of significant influence my whole life, but several jazz artists have too, and not just the greats like Davis and Coltrane. These artists demanded freedom to exist as they were and demanded the freedom to make their art. Van Gogh certainly painted outside the norm of his day, and Beethoven refused certain commissions so he could compose what he wanted.

🦋 *Continues below* 🦋



QUILTATIONS

There is no line where art stops and life begins.



-Charles Eames

How do you balance having your own vision for an artwork but still letting it decide its own progress?

A lot of it is basic intuition. If I get a sense that an artwork needs to be a certain size, and therefore "demands" that, it is most likely that somewhere in the back of my mind I have a sense of its impact statement before it's finished. Sometimes as I'm working on a piece, its meaning shifts and changes, so I adjust what I'm creating based on those changes. They can be subtle. On rare occasions, a piece changes because I don't have the skill developed to do what I originally envisioned. In that case, I either adjust to keep my plans based on what I can do in the moment, or I take the time to learn that new skill. Hence why some pieces take me so long to make.

You talk a lot about the importance of having balance between your personal life and your life as an artist. What are some of the more mundane (less philosophical and more physical) ways you create balance in the studio?

Well, as we have discussed before, for me the philosophical is the precursor to the physical, so, it's difficult to give a disparate answer. I'd say first, it isn't always easy because as you know my studio is in my house, which might be in part why you are asking. One thing I do is to keep the door to the studio closed when I'm not working in it. Weekends, for example, have always been family time and I like to keep it that way. I also keep food out of the studio, although I drink water, tea, or occasionally white wine (never red) while I'm working. It isn't just because of the smell and oils and crumbs. But, and here's where the philosophical and physical conjoin, it is because when it's time to eat, it's time to eat. When it's time to work, it's time to work. As I mentioned before, my personal ideology is "age quod agis." It helps me keep moving forward consistently even if slowly.

What does a typical day look like for you?

Every day is different. There's too much variability in a day for me to stick to a hard and fast schedule. It's more accurate to look at my typical week. Mondays tend to be for office work: studio organizing, computer work, website development, orders, newsletter, etc. It's rare that I put needle to fabric on Mondays. Tuesdays through Fridays tend to be creative days in the studio, meaning hand to fabric in whatever capacity I have going on. I generally am in the studio starting at 9:30 AM, and I end between 3:00-5:30 PM. It kind of depends on what I am working on. Some things are more draining than others, so I need to stop early. Then there are the factors of other appointments, meetings, work, classes, etc. that I have scheduled. Stress in my personal life often leads to stagnation in the studio, so I am very careful about how I prioritize my time. I still have obligations I need to attend to, but I work to manage my internal peace as much as possible.

What do you do to relax when you're not working?

Walking, hiking, reading when I have the chance. I enjoy talking with John about all kinds of things from the mundane (How was your day? And all the nitty gritty details therein) to the philosophical (What has been your best experience with the sublime?). We like to sit on the patio, share a bottle of wine, watch the birds, and talk about life - every aspect of it. I also love talking with you as you well know! I'm also a big fan of the cozy murder mysteries.

Imagine you are at the end of your life. You've gained all the skills you need and want as an artist. If you could only make one more art piece, what would it be?

I would just work on whatever I was working on. I love and have loved every piece I've made because it's the one I'm making in that moment and therefore not only needs to be made but is asking to be created. I have no "dying wish" as it were. Again, I'd follow the saying "age quod agis" because I'd be doing whatever I was doing.

What does success as an artist mean to you?

There is a lot of pressure from society and social media to become a commercial success. But it's more important to me that I have artistic and creative success. That's where I have found my greatest happiness as an artist.

Well thank you, Mara. This has been wonderful. I love getting to know you as an adult friend and not just as my mom. You raised me that way to begin with, so this comes naturally to me. But it is still a nice way to continue to learn about each other. It also makes me think more about my own path, what success means to me, and how I want to achieve that for myself. You always give me a lot to think about.

Sofia, this has been my absolute pleasure. I love connecting with you, and just as much as you suggest you have learned from me, I have learned equally, in both quality and quantity, from you. Thank you.

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UNIQUE QUILTED AND FABRIC ART

As an artist, my passion is to create unique quilted and fabric art. I was always drawn to sewing as a child, and now I am able to live my dream of artistic creativity through fabric. I am inspired to use materials and techniques that range from the traditional to those I make up as needed.

That's what makes it ArtSewDifferent!