

Lisa Mee Integrates Recycled Materials Into Her Art

- Isaiah Lawrence (www.artdealerstreet.com) April 9, 2021

Lisa Mee (Doherty) is an Irish-Korean American artist who fervently creates work that resonates with others by using recycled materials (like paper, fabrics, and metals) to incorporate in her metallic paintings. Her Korean-born mother (an architect) and Irish-American father (a former ballet student and actor, turned chiropractor) were passionate about art and collecting, taking her to museums, art fairs, and galleries as a child.

Her collages, which she carefully sorts, cuts, and assembles for mixed media, encapsulate natural harmony. Captivated by rhythms and colors from the saturated sunset or the reflections of light from aesthetic waterscapes, she gives her artwork a stained glass effect. Adding recycled material that most people would find useless, she creates extraordinary beauty out of it. According to Lisa, her artwork illustrates her “commitment to express environmental concerns about the fragile ecological state of our planet by demonstrating how to reuse and recycle in a creative way.”

Lisa Mee attended Fordham University where she pursued a degree in “political science”, then she met her future husband, Wayne Ensrud (the protégée of the Austrian artist, Oskar Kokoschka and Oskar was the student of Gustav Klimt). In 1995, she became a “studio director” at “Wayne Ensrud Studio” (for 25 years); in 2003, she became a “visual artist,” (including painting, graphic designing, curating, and photographing), and in 2014, she became a “design partner” at “New Earth Wines.”

In December of 2007, she was a featured artist for “Ovation TV” on the “Art or Not” program. At the “TransFORM Gallery” she taught for an “Earth Day” workshop for children (ages 5-8) about mixed media collage painting techniques, in April of 2013. Some of her exhibitions are the “Louis Aronow Gallery” in 2008, “JH Brown Fine Art” in May of 2010, “Kashan Gallery” in June 2011, “High Line Open Studios” in March of 2011, “Art Gotham Gallery” (at the ‘Square Foot Show’) in June of 2011, “Great Neck Arts Center” in October of 2011, in October of 2011, “Kipton Art” in March of 2012, “TransFORM Gallery” in March of 2013, “Angelique NYC” curated by “Indiewalls” in May of 2013, “Hudson Valley Finds Gallery” in September 2015, in September of 2016, “Ceres Gallery” in March of 2018, “The Breakers” in May of 2019, “International Art Museum of America” in March of 2020, and “Leviton Fine Art” in April of 2020. Making a name for herself, she’s recognized by art collectors in New York City as well as China and Europe.

Your figurative work is “dedicated to the female aura and its power regardless of oppression and tumult.” If I’m playing devil’s advocate and wonder why you don’t have heavyset and/or physically impaired women in figurative paintings, how would you convince me this?

So far, my figurative paintings are self-portraits where I use my own form as the catalyst. This work does not idealize the female shape. Traditionally in art, women were painted by men for other men to look at. By depicting myself in a painting, I am simultaneously the artist and the artist’s model. Like many women, I have been at odds with my own body through its many changes to the point of crippling insecurity. I live in New York City where cat-calling is sport for many men. I’ve had totally strange men walk up to me saying I had to lose weight among other derogatory things. I portray a hard-fought self-acceptance in these paintings of myself. I have mixed ethnicity (Korean and Irish) and it’s rare to see an Asian portrayed in paintings or even in popular culture unless it’s stereotypical. Physical, sexual and ethnic diversity acceptance is stronger than ever but we still live in a culture where we are bombarded with diets, air-brushed images and extreme exercise regimes that feed physical self-doubt. I plan to expand my painting depictions of the figure to encompass a wider range of humanity.

There’s an exotic vibe I get from you when I look at your paintings. You use strikingly vibrant colors with nature and it’s as if the florals, creatures have a symbolic history. In “Serenity 2,” there’s a lady resting in what could be a

mattress or the ground around flowers. It's as if she's growing when she sleeps or thinks due to the roots from her bed. What were your intentions when creating this piece? What's the story behind it?

I created this painting during the pandemic, when the COVID infections were at its highest point in New York City where I live. Venturing outside became an anxious experience knowing the virus was rampant. I sought solace by creating paintings. 'Serenity 2' emerged from that time. It shows a woman, embracing herself and huddled on a bed to seek comfort. She is alone, like so many during this pandemic, who need to find solace and reassurance within themselves. Flowers are often given or sent to bring joy so they add an uplifting element to the painting.



"Serenity 2" acrylic and metallic paint on canvas, 24 x 30 in © 2020 All Rights Reserved

Your painting called "View of the Brooklyn Bridge" has a sky that appears like a vibrant version of Vincent Van Gogh's "Starry Night". Was that your intention? In the painting, the reflection of the water shows the sky. The sky appears to have 8 or 9 stars in the sky. From the texture effects of carvings on the bridge to the blue buildings in the background, you've captured a dramatic look.

Certainly, Van Gogh's "Starry Night" spurred me on to paint my vision of an emblazoned sky, luminous and filled with otherworldly stars. This was a commissioned painting so I wanted to follow the amazing structure of the Brooklyn Bridge but also add my own creative play of curving shapes and textures against the straights of the bridge's structure and the city buildings. This juxtaposition creates a dramatic balanced tension within the composition



"VIEW OF THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE" acrylic and metallic paint on canvas, 24 x 36 in © 2020 All rights Reserved

In “View of Mont Blanc”, you’ve used a saturated sunset with numerous patterns that gives viewers a mixture of feelings. What does this work of art represent to you?

Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in the Alps and Western Europe. It’s a massive, imposing testament to the power of nature. My husband Wayne loves mountains and we travelled often to the French side of the Alps. One gorgeous sunny autumn afternoon, he took me to an outdoor restaurant near the large ski village of Chamonix. We dined outside and enjoyed this spectacular view of Mont Blanc which had a cap of pure white snow. The rest of the valley around us was vibrantly lush as it was a warm autumn at that time. The air was clear and invigorating so the sky was pure blue. The contrast between the stark white of the mountain and the rich landscape around us was remarkable. I loved revisiting that memory which is captured on this canvas.



“View of Mont Blanc” acrylic and metallic paint on canvas, 30 x 24 in © 2020 All Rights Reserved

You create your artwork by collecting recycled materials like papers, fabrics, and metals, integrating them into your paintings. By integrating such items, it shows your “commitment to express environmental concerns about the fragile ecological state of our planet by demonstrating how to reuse and recycle in a creative way.” Also, your artwork creates a stained-glass effect. Is there another secret ingredient that you use to create the stained-glass effect?

I use metallic paint to enhance edges, forms and shapes. This element adds a luminous textural dimension to the canvas surface. A lot of artists use metallic paints as a finish but I integrate them into the unexpected details and elements of a painting in order to keep viewers engaged so they discover something different each time they look at one of my artworks.

How long have you been using a collage approach while creating art?

Collage launched me into painting as well as a full-time dedication to my art because it helped me to experience the joy of the creative process. My husband Wayne (a well-known longtime professional artist) introduced me to the medium. Rather than just focusing on drawing and painting, collage elements enlarged my creative capacity by adding unexpected fabrics, papers and photos into paintings. A good friend of mine owned a large quilting shop in Vermont. She mailed me boxes of scraps of fabrics that she couldn’t bear to throw out – many were handmade batik fabrics. She said she was sure I could use them in my paintings which I certainly did and continue to use today. These materials prompted new creative impulses which expanded my ‘orchestra’.

You've been a studio director at Wayne Ensrud Studio for 25 years. I can't leave out that your husband is Wayne Ensrud, a protégée of Oskar Kokoschka, who was the student of Gustav Klimt. How's it like having a husband who is also an artist? Do you ever share the same canvas? Do you want space when creating art?

I am blessed and fortunate to have such wonderfully loving support from my husband Wayne. He doesn't want me to be his clone but rather to develop my own creative 'voice'. We share the same passion of creating art and the belief that beautiful art uplifts the soul and has a healing power, a philosophy instilled in him by his mentor, Oskar Kokoschka. We were commissioned not too long ago to 'co-create' a canvas. It was a joy and we were so in tune with each other that the painting integrated so much to the point that you couldn't tell who painted what. We both gravitate to vibrant colors and balanced compositions so it's no surprise that the commissioned painting materialized so seamlessly. We share a work studio but paint at opposite ends of the space at our own work tables and easels. We hardly talk to each other while we are painting because we are immersed in our own creative process. Once finished, we show our works to each other. I trust Wayne's impeccably detailed eye which can pick up on unresolved areas on canvas.



"MERGING OF SKY, EARTH AND WATER IN THE CAMARGUE MARSH" acrylic and metallic paint on canvas, 30 x 24 in © 2020 All Rights Reserved

I know that you use metallic paint, that you use recycled pieces to incorporate to your art, and that your husband has a huge impact on your art career. Do you sketch before painting? What steps do you take before creating your full piece?

I do sketch out ideas of paintings and then transfer them to canvas. The sketch drawing is not so detailed to the point where I am just filling in spaces with colors. I allow creative impulses to guide me as I create the painting. That freedom is empowering and liberating. The sketch is a framework which is the starting point. I always listen to jazz music as I paint so I am immersed in a carefree mood. I am not interested in creating morbid paintings. I want to create uplifting images which will buoy viewers especially during these challenging times of solitude and anxiety.



"Peace Lilies" acrylic and metallic paint on canvas, 30 x 24 in © 2020 All Rights Reserved

As an established artist, you received the attention of art collectors in New York City as well as internationally in Europe and China. You've exhibited at numerous galleries. What's next for you in art? What are your goals? Do you have any future projects?

I continue to present and sell my paintings through AVC (America's Value Channel) Fine Art Auction which is televised live through various cable networks nationwide every weekend. I also show my paintings through Leviton Fine Art as well as Singulart who have encouraged and shown me great support. I am blessed to have representation who found such a large audience for my paintings which continues to grow. I plan to expand into creating larger scale paintings of abstract imagery as well as figurative paintings. At the end of this March, I was invited by the International Art Museum of America in San Francisco to virtually present and talk about my artwork in honor of Women's History Month.



"Tree of Life" acrylic and metallic paint on canvas, 24 x 30 in © 2020 All Rights Reserved

It's argued that most items dropped in recycling bins aren't being recycled. Recycled items are usually dumped in landfills, which could be unhealthy for the planet. Do you think recycling is a scam and is this another reason why you reuse recycled items in your paintings?

Creating mixed media/collage paintings makes impermanent objects permanent by preserving them on canvas. It's tragic how much is discarded in our world when it can be used in unexpectedly creative ways. I remember seeing a documentary about Picasso and how he used to go to dump sites to find objects for his artworks. I was in Barcelona at the Picasso Museum and one of his sculptures caught my eye. He transformed a bicycle seat and handlebars into a sculpture of a bull's head. It was simultaneously whimsical, timeless and reflected his sense of humor as well as his immense creativity. I enjoy integrating unexpected items like paper scraps, paint rags, old jewelry, photos and fabrics into my artworks so that they surprise the viewers. It's a way of transforming things at first viewed as mundane trash into something precious and unique. I try to combine these pieces into an artwork so they blend seamlessly into the painting.

If you want to contact Lisa Mee or be updated on her latest projects, here's her contact information:

www.lisameeart.com

Work Cites:

Mee, Lisa: [Lisa Mee: The Art of Lisa Mee](#) 2020.

Mee, Lisa.: Instagram [lisamee_art](#)" 2021.

Mee, Lisa: Facebook. [Lee Mee Art](#) 2021.

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Doherty, Lisa: LinkedIn [Lisa Doherty](#)

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