



A Conversation with Sasha Merritt

By Sherri Cornett

Talking with Sasha Merritt about her art is a journey of verbs (reflect, push, pull, mark, wonder, explore, loop, examine, reveal), light and texture. For her sculptures, she often works in rounds, meditatively increasing and decreasing the shape as the work demands, using both crochet techniques and finger looping to manipulate the brass, copper and steel wire into her ethereal hanging sculpture. She paints with abandon, letting the colors and drips lead her, building layer upon layer, with thick glazes, adding tissue paper and found objects for extra texture. Or, she might intently study the forms of her subjects, working the minute detail of each petal and feather.

SC: Sasha, I imagine you as a dancer, moving through and exploring relationship of body to space.

SM: "Look with your eyes, not your hands." I heard that a lot as a kid. And I am still very tactile - using my hands and fingers in both painting and sculpture. Pushing and pulling the paint with brushes, pallet knives, and my hands creates texture and a topography that tempts the viewer to also "look with their hands." I love the feel of paint marking the canvas, the layers of color that mask and reveal, with unexpected results. By playing with wire gauges and density of looping, the quality and contours of the shadows are controlled and manipulated. I am exploring the malleability of the wire - how manipulating the soft wire into forms creates structure and stability. I love the feel of wire pulling on the hook or wrapped through my fingers as well as the feel of the final form the surfaces of the shapes create.

SC: The shadows of your hanging wire sculptures are mesmerizing.

SM: I am captivated by shapes, curves and negative spaces, and how the light reflects off of the bends of the wire . . . how the direction and intensity of light alters and shifts the shadows . . . about the ways the pieces move in space, how they interact with the environment, responding to airflow and movement, twisting and turning and transforming the shadows. The shadows compliment the sculptures, but also create unique, illusive imaginary separate from the wire.

SC: You and I share the natural inspiration of the Greater Rocky Mountain landscapes, so I am curious as to how this manifests in your work.

SM: I grew up in Denver, in the shadow of the Rockies. The shapes and colors of rock formations, the character and personality of creatures all are either directly or indirectly a part of my work. When I do abstract work, either paintings or sculpture, the forms, lines and colors of the sky, trees, and rocks formations, even icicles come into the work. I also love painting flora and fauna, letting the personalities speak to me through the painting. And then there is the majesty of the natural world, which reminds me that there are much bigger things than me.

SC: You paint both realistically and more whimsically . . .

SM: Each of my painting series explores different colors, textures, or themes based on the moods and experiences current in my world. Playing with themes of humor and the unexpected, depicting animals in dapper accessories or fancy dress brings a giggle while I work. Painting allows me to step into a world where I wonder such things as what does a wasp keep in her handbag? The process of finding the detail in the feather of an owl's wing takes my mind into another experience, almost a meditative space where only color, form and texture matter.

SC: Are there any other creative outlets in your life?

SM: I did apprentice as a tattoo artist and now do 3D, trompe-l'œil nipple tattoos for women after breast cancer reconstruction.

SC: Impressive! I have heard how powerful this can be for women. One last question. Will you tell me about your studio experience at Arc Gallery?

SM: The community and connections with other artists is continually inspiring and the connections I've made bring me joy. The artists and owners create a space that is welcoming and encourages creativity. It is always a pleasure to talk with the wonderful variety of art lovers - from kids to retired people - who come to the regular events at Arc.

Sasha's work may be found online at <http://www.artbysasha.com/>
Sherri Cornett is a curator, artist and consultant living in Billings, Montana. www.sherricornett.com

