

# **Melissa Cole Studios**

## **Artist Statement**

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Over the last fifteen years I've been delighted to discover that with the most mundane ingredients-- acrylic, canvas, concrete, glass, metal, clay and wood-- I can form something that seemingly vibrates with its own raw energy. I relish the moments when my artwork makes people stop their mad hurtle through life to pause, breathe and enjoy an experience.

Because of my past adventures as a naturalist guide and my marriage to a marine photographer, I've been lucky enough to snorkel with salmon, stroke baby gray whales and swim with tiger sharks. It is from these amazing encounters that I derive much of the inspiration for my vividly colored, textured and patterned mixed media paintings and mosaic sculptures. I am also influenced by a childhood spent in India, extensive travels abroad, and by my background in zoology.

Unfortunately, in my travels I have also witnessed the rapid destruction of the environment. Because of this, I feel it is incredibly important to bring touches of the natural realm to urban settings. These serve as reminders to people within a glass and concrete landscape, and help them reconnect with nature. Although I could portray the sometimes stark reality of environmental degradation, I would like my artwork to be an escape for both viewer and artist. While rivers are damned, oceans often polluted, and plastic blows through deserts, in my paintings fish glide through clear water and rabbits leap unspoiled territory. My artworks are dreams, which are filled with emotion, desire, energy and joy. They are a touch of what I wish for this earth.

Working in the Dominican Republic as a Peace Corps volunteer after I completed my science degree helped to shape my artistic career. I was fortunate enough to work in a village of artisans and basket weavers. This experience of creating artwork within a community showed me what a powerful force art has on people. It breaks down cross-cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic barriers. Whenever possible, I use this knowledge in my large installations and public works. I am passionate about involving the public in the art process through my community-built public works of art, which instill a sense of pride and ownership. I thrive on demystifying art and on watching people of all ages and experiences find the confidence within themselves to create and share their life stories with others.

Within each public work, I strive to create a strong sense of place. I greatly enjoy working with committees and design professionals to realize projects, and all of my projects have been completed on time and within budget.