

Melissa Allegories

October 2023



We caught up with the brilliant and insightful Melissa Allegories a few weeks ago and have shared our conversation below.

1. Melissa, thanks for taking the time to share your stories with us today. Can you talk to us about a project that's meant a lot to you?

There are facts in fiction. I merge creative writing and visual art, employing allegory to create a semi-hidden narrative in my work. I use real-life experiences to compose visual and authored fictitious stories, making the journey a by-product of my creative process. With a secular/humanistic focus, I introduce philosophical ideas through modern allegories and visual arts. My creations aim to provoke thought and prompt viewers or audiences to engage in philosophical reflection. I combine artistic expression, such as the visual arts and literature, as vehicles for philosophical exploration and communication. Often blurring the boundaries between art and philosophy, I blend visual and textual elements to create a unique narrative or convey complex ideas. I leverage the power of art and visual storytelling to engage with philosophical concepts, making them more accessible and thought-provoking for a broader audience. Using visuals as a powerful medium for storytelling and expression, I employ allegories or a string of metaphors in a style reminiscent of medieval art to engage readers and provoke thought. I'm interested in approaching the use of physical, non-digital mediums with a secularism mindset that draws inspiration from medieval aesthetics, in a contemporary era.

My ongoing project, *MelissAllegories*, comprises five interconnected worlds, each with its own setting and characters. This gradually expanding body of work unfolds across five distinct realms within one interconnected world called *Lében* (German for Life): "At the Garden," "The Deep-Sea," "Caged-City," "Inside the Cave," and "The Electric Forest." Each realm introduces a unique setting with its own central characters, all intricately interwoven to convey a multitude of metaphors that collectively explore secular principles and

values. "At the Garden" takes precedence over the other worlds in *Lében*. This narrative explores human values like hope, inspiring self-actualization and human flourishing. With a hermetic view, the framework of each composition in "At the Garden" focuses on a blooming theme that embodies personal growth and enlightenment through temperance: the practice of finding harmony within ourselves and manifesting "the greater good" in the concrete world with our actions. I've titled myself an "artist-philosopher" because I've spent a lot of time pondering life deeply. I enjoy gathering wisdom from others (e.g., like Sam Harris and Sadhguru), then finding ways to share it through visual arts and the written word. It's a complex task that has prompted me to reassess my approach several times. I was awarded the Broward County Cultural Division's Artists Support Grant in September 2023 to move forward with my project, "At the Garden," thus serving humanity through human ingenuity with the storytelling arts. I love stories that feel empowering! I'm motivated and inspired by these great ideas/stories and simple truths that are rewritten, passing down from generation to generation to improve the quality of our lives. In my lifetime, these are the things I've absorbed and hope to portray in my visual artworks/narratives and creative writings.

2. Melissa, before we move on to more of these sorts of questions, can you take some time to bring our readers up to speed on you and what you do?

I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, with Dominican ancestry. As a child, I was notably reserved with a vivid imagination, taking immense pleasure in visually expressing my thoughts, emotions, and principles. I've always seen life as a continuous journey of trial and inquiry, which led me to ask countless questions. My relentless curiosity often vexed those around me as I embarked on a path of experiential learning. It has always seemed to me that adaptation is fundamental, although I recognize that it doesn't solely equate to prosperity and success (just as toxins can change and thrive). In my pursuit of self-actualization, I've been growing steadily, tending to the "seeds in my soles" with the hope that, one day, I'll shoot up like a bamboo tree.

During my early years at Public School 167 in Brooklyn, New York, I engaged in various theatrical activities. Nevertheless, it was in my fourth-grade class, which featured an integration of visual arts, that I truly began to express myself. I was part of the bilingual education program, up until the third grade. Within the program, I had the opportunity to perform on stage with my classmates in front of a large audience of parents and teachers. These performances ranged from singing "The Rainbow Color Song" to lively dances, chants, and dressing in a manner that celebrated Indigenous cultures and Latin traditions. I distinctly recall preparing to dance to Latin music in a vibrant purple salsa outfit, complete with an extending ruffle fringe on the back of my short skirt, which I paired with purple stockings. In the fourth grade, my mother noticed that my proficiency in her native language, reading, and writing was not as strong as she'd hoped. As a result, she made the decision to transition me out of the bilingual program. I was then placed in an all-English class, where I discovered a deep affection for my instructor, developed a keen interest in solving mathematical problems, and experienced an incredible surge in my



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expressiveness through the visual arts. During my childhood, we had a massive collection of VHS tapes, including classics like "Penguin and the Pebbles," "Bambi," and "Dumbo." My late father had a talent for singing, storytelling, and composing lyrics and short poems, which greatly influenced my passion for the art of storytelling, shaped by my upbringing and surroundings. At the age of 10, on the 11th day of June in 1995 (when my family and I moved to Florida), I began to independently captivate myself and expand my knowledge about the world by diving into nonfiction books. My imagination continued to flourish, fueled by my fond recollections of life in New York. Throughout my life, I've held a fascination for architectural intricacies and natural forms, as well as lines and patterns. I slowly acquired my late father's love for gardening (as a visual art form). While living in South Florida, often referred to by its original Spanish name, "La Florida," meaning "place of flowers," I developed a passion for nature and found solace at the garden. My work is fueled by a fascination with intricate details and follows a stylized form of symbolist art, emphasizing ethics, harmony, and nature while employing a push-and-pull technique. Geometric patterns are evident in both nature and the structures we design, reflecting a form of architectural mimicry. Despite the ever-changing landscape of our creations, I believe humans possess an inherent attraction to the natural world, as described by the biophilia hypothesis. We share a symbiotic relationship with the tools we craft and the physical environment.

The notion that heaven and hell reside within us—"as within, so without"—fascinates me. This concept came to me as a way to suggest that if hell exists on Earth, then heaven is a state of mind. Conversely, if heaven exists within us, it can manifest as heaven on Earth. Numerous studies have consistently shown that interactions with natural environments, exposure to green spaces, and spending time in nature are linked to a broad spectrum of psychological benefits. This reinforces the importance of creating environments that are both psychologically and ecologically responsible while nurturing a profound connection to nature.

3. Let's talk about resilience next – do you have a story you can share with us?

I've always had an all-or-nothing mindset, which at times held me back from taking action. I couldn't and still cannot bring myself to pick up a brush or pencil to fulfill others' artistic requests. As a result, for a span of two years, I intentionally maintained a low social profile. During this period, I primarily collected ideas but lacked the motivation to create tangible art. I firmly believe that art should carry intrinsic value and intellectual depth. It's not just about aesthetics; it should represent a meaningful reflection of oneself (and the universe) that can be shared with others.

The passing of my father in January 2021 compelled me to confront my creative ambitions. I also acquired valuable knowledge and skills through my involvement with the National Society of Leadership and Success, which led to the establishment of Smile Sweet Sunflower LLC on July 13, 2022, to further my artistic endeavors. This journey marked a pivotal moment in rebuilding my social presence. I've always had a strong aversion to being envied or belittled. While I've made progress in overcoming these limiting beliefs and feelings of inadequacy that were instilled in my subconscious mind, there are still times when I struggle to recognize my self-worth.

I extend my gratitude to all the teachers and supporters who have shown their appreciation for my work by liking, following, or subscribing.

Positive energy from such individuals has been empowering, while those who belittle or envy me, I've learned to do without. My self-esteem and self-worth have been shaped by both supportive figures and the challenges I've encountered in my personal and professional life. Love and career experiences have taught me valuable lessons about distinguishing between short-term and long-term pleasures, and taking on a diverse range of jobs has given me a broader perspective.

4. Is there something you think non-creatives will struggle to understand about your journey as a creative? Maybe you can provide some insight – you never know who might benefit from the enlightenment.

In the simplest terms, art is a powerful medium for creation and communication, encompassing various forms, including visual studio arts, architecture, and literature. Within this expansive spectrum, art remains inherently subjective, and what one person values as authentic art may differ from another person's perspective. The definitions of "art" and "artist" can be highly subjective and personalized, serving as a means for artists to express their sentiments and experiences. Artists have diverse motivations, styles, and intents, and all forms of artistic expression hold their place and value. Functional artists create art with practical use, such as furniture makers, while nonfunctional artists emphasize pure artistic expression in traditional fine arts like painting and sculpture, where aesthetics and concepts take precedence over utility.

In a way, every work of art tends to serve some function, whether it's social, aesthetic, cultural, or utilitarian. My art takes an indirect approach, perceived through the senses, and it serves humanity through storytelling. To me, art serves as a channel of communication, a way to create visually pleasing and intellectually stimulating works that convey ethical and meaningful messages. Indirect functional artists, such as those working in architecture and industrial design, seamlessly integrate art with functionality to enhance our daily experiences. This category extends beyond the physical realm and includes artists who utilize mediums like literature, film, and multimedia storytelling to engage people's senses and emotions for utilitarian purposes, such as conveying impactful narratives through books, movies, and digital media. In essence, books, movies, and visually written stories are functional art because they combine artistic expression with a practical and functional purpose, enriching our lives through their aesthetic, educational, and societal contributions. Artists create aesthetically pleasing and intellectually rich works that reflect culture, values, and human experiences. Throughout history, different cultures and movements have expressed their identity and values through art. Contemporary art is innovative, often manifesting new trends that align with an artist's authentic style and message. Art is inherently tied to the identity of the creator, and it's crucial for artists to align their style or way of creating with their interests and what they wish to convey. Art reflects the artist and, by extension, society. During my high school years from 1999 to 2003, I explored various styles and techniques through creative writing, observation-based drawing, and imaginative exploration. My work serves a dual purpose: an aesthetic, creative value and a practical, utilitarian function. I use art and design as a means to convey essential, meaningful messages. For me, the core focus is on the idea/story, with skills and tools serving as elements of aesthetic delivery.

