

AL-TIBA9 CONTEMPORARY ART

10 QUESTIONS WITH MELISSA ALLEGORIES

**Melissa Allegories - Portrait**

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Melissa Allegories was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, with ancestry in the Dominican Republic. In 2011, she completed her Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art (concentrating on drawing, painting, and printmaking) at Florida Atlantic University, where she developed her distinctive artistic style. She graduated magna cum laude, with a general GPA of 3.5/4.0 and 3.7 in her major. As a member of The National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS), Melissa aspires to become an influential artist. She hopes to inspire other leaders, advocates, and the community at large. Her vocation is to create aesthetically pleasing and intellectual works of art and support services that positively impact humanity.

Melissa's artwork is a mixture of creative writing with allegorical representations. Her artistic style has been subconsciously influenced by and developed out of boundless ideas drawn forth from American culture, universal themes, and an openness to foreign ideology. Her pieces are composed by combining figurative or representational imagery, varying line weight and quality to imply space and movement using non-linear or atmospheric perspective, integrating overlapping imagery, and using organic and geometric shapes. She exercises a push-and-pull technique and focuses on ethical insights, patterns in nature, and harmony with all things.

ARTIST STATEMENT

"Books are indirect functional works of art. They are considered sacred, and the origin of storytelling can be traced back to visual stories, such as cave art. Studies have revealed that long after the emergence of cuneiform on wax tablets and text on papyrus rolls, the Greeks created the oldest surviving codex or handwritten manuscript. Scribes and illuminators were instrumental in crafting these sacred books, often using precious metals like gold and silver. My lifelong fascination with antiquities and hidden treasures has driven my creative journey.

I consider myself an indirect functional Artist-Philosopher and Visual Writer, dedicated to constructing a fictitious world that promotes secular virtues and reveals simple truths. You can think of me as a 21st-century symbolist, with the aim of provoking thought, curiosity, and inquisitiveness through allegorical depictions.

Despite the ongoing evolution of technology, humans are inherently drawn to nature, a phenomenon known as the biophilia hypothesis. We share a symbiotic relationship with the tools we create and the physical environment. It is imperative for engineers to continue developing more human-centered designs and ethical works of art that benefit humanity.

Similarly, it is crucial for traditional artists to preserve the use of physical, non-digital mediums. Most of us aspire to invest our time and energy in creating ethical works of art and designs that serve humanity. In contrast to "traditional" or "academic" artists who prioritize technical proficiency and mastery of artistic techniques, I enjoyed a high degree of creative freedom during my time in high school and college, where I pursued my degree in the arts. This freedom allowed me to express myself without constraints and empowered me to develop a distinctive and unique artistic style. I place a strong emphasis on ideas, concepts, and the underlying messages within my work, rather

than focusing solely on the technical execution of traditional artistic skills. I have also explored higher forms of technology when it complements my artistic vision, such as exploring robotic reinterpretations of my artworks.

I am deeply interested in intricate and subtle details, finding pleasure in creating a stylized form of symbolist art. I rework and implement new concepts by combining representational imagery, varying line-weight and quality to convey space and movement, overlapping and superimposing imagery, employing harmonious and contrasting colors, and using organic and geometric shapes. The framework of each composition is a product of interconnected ideas expressed allegorically, influenced by originality and socio-cultural factors. My focus revolves around ethics, harmony, and nature, utilizing a push and pull technique." - Melissa Allegories

INTERVIEW

First, tell us more about yourself. How did you first get interested in making art?

I am the middle child among five siblings, born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, to parents originating from the Dominican Republic. From a youthful age, my quiet demeanor and vivid imagination led me to find solace and joy in visually expressing my ideas, feelings, and values.

Embracing life as an ongoing process of trial and error, I questioned the world around me, often annoying others through my thirst for discovery learning. During my time at Public School 167 in Brooklyn, I initially expressed myself through theatrical performances. From singing The Rainbow Color Song to dancing and dressing in vibrant costumes to celebrate Latin culture, I discovered a joy for visual arts, which was integrated into my 4th-grade class.

My fascination with towering buildings and a growing appreciation for natural forms evolved over the years. At the age of 10, our family relocated to Florida in 1995, marking the beginning of my independent exploration of the world through nonfiction books, fueled by vivid recollections of life in New York and a flourishing imagination.

Interest in architectural intricacies and a love for gardening, inherited from my late father, shaped my perspective, allowing me to view the world through the lens of lines and patterns. This early exposure laid the foundation for my passion. As a result, I delved into creating a stylized form of symbolist art, where intricate and subtle details take precedence.

What is your artistic background? And what training helped you develop into the artist you are today?

I initially aspired to become a singer, inspired by my late father, who frequently serenaded our immediate family. One cherished childhood memory involves singing my favorite song, "Dreams to Dream" by Linda Ronstadt from the movie "An American Tail: Fievel Goes West." However, I soon realized that singing well requires extensive practice and energy. As an introvert pushed to socialize more during my upbringing, I chose a quieter path, gravitating towards the visual arts.

Fortunate to attend art school, I focused primarily on "Line Art" due to financial constraints. My unique perspective, always perceiving the world through lines and patterns, manifested in resourcefulness. Growing up, I utilized whatever materials were available to express myself artistically, marking the beginning of my exploration with various mediums, including crayons, color

pencils, correction pens, high-lighters, and more. This period also saw a blend of creative writing, observation-based drawing, and imaginative exploration.

During my high school years from 1999 to 2003, I independently delved into various artistic styles, exploring primitive art, abstract art, cubism, impressionism, and pointillism. Though never taught traditional fine art like classical painting and realistic drawing, I embraced techniques such as gesture and contour drawing, linear and non-linear perspective, color theory, and other foundational principles and elements of art. The emphasis was on fostering ingenuity - cleverness, originality, and inventiveness - which steered away from conventional approaches.

In 2011, I earned my Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art from Florida Atlantic University, specializing in painting, drawing, and printmaking. In contrast to traditional or academic artists, my high school and college journey provided significant creative freedom, enabling me to express myself without constraints. This liberty empowered the development of a distinct and unique style that leans heavily towards conceptual and contemporary art, aligning with the philosophy that "the concept is the most important aspect of the work," as advocated by Sol LeWitt.

Why are you an artist, and when did you first realize you wanted to become one?

Life took a challenging turn when my family moved to Florida in 1995, bringing about a period of turmoil. Witnessing tragic events and psychological distress among close ones, I felt a deep-seated desire to mediate these issues, seeking peace and harmony through enlightenment and discovery—an awakening that fosters human flourishing through individualized self-actualization. At the time, I lacked the words to articulate this yearning

and was unsure of how I would contribute to the world.

The arts have been ingrained in me since birth, with my late father sharing his passion for music, poetry, and storytelling. It served as a form of communication and an intrinsic commodity. By the age of 10, seeking solace and education in nonfiction books and the garden, I nurtured the growth of my imagination. Entering high school marked the commencement of my journey as an aspiring artist. Immersed in creativity, I authored short stories and poems, exploring various drawing styles and techniques. Throughout my high school years from 1999 to 2003, I committed myself to daily writing and drawing, blending observation with imaginative exploration.

Graduating high school at 17, I immediately enrolled at The Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale (AIFL) in the summer of 2003. My inclination was naturally toward something with intrinsic worth, desiring to share my ideas and insights. Despite not recognizing my passion for the storytelling arts until later, I pursued Studio Art at Florida Atlantic University (FAU), realizing this in my final year in fall 2010.

My artistic pursuits center around creating aesthetically pleasing and intellectually stimulating narrative art, aiming to contribute to a more just and inclusive society.

How would you define yourself as an artist today?

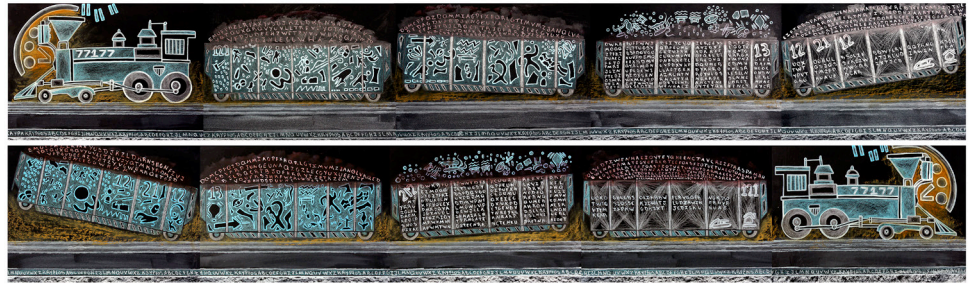
I define myself as an 'artist-philosopher,' having spent considerable time delving into profound reflections on life. Despite an

initial connection to the Catholic faith and a brief stint in Christianity—during which I was not at my best, fueled by anger towards everyone, including God—I distanced myself from rigid beliefs. This marked a transformative shift, leading me to adopt an open-minded and compassionate perspective.

Believing in the need for positive and impactful secular messages for social cohesion, I recognize that we can shape the culture we want through the stories we tell. Presently, I align with a secular, agnostic humanist worldview to champion values such as reason, compassion, and hope—universal principles that aspiring civil people can agree on—through my creative endeavors.

Functioning as an indirect yet purposeful artist-philosopher and visual writer, I construct a fictitious world to advocate secular virtues and reveal simple truths. This approach is reminiscent of a 21st-century symbolist, aiming to provoke thought and curiosity through allegorical depictions, much like a medieval illuminator would if born in a different era.

My artistic identity is further enriched by my commitment to gathering wisdom from thinkers like Sam Harris and Sadhguru, channeling this knowledge into visual and written expressions. In essence, my art combines artistic expression with a functional purpose, enriching lives through its aesthetic, educational, and societal contributions. I view art as a powerful medium for creation and communication, taking an indirect approach perceived through the senses. For me, it serves as a channel to craft vis-



Tick Tock, Mixed media on Crescent Black Mounting Board, 15 x 200 in, 2011 © Melissa Allegories

ually pleasing and intellectually stimulating works conveying ethical and meaningful messages.

Let us talk about your work. Can you tell us about the process of creating your work? What aspect of your work do you pay particular attention to?

Let us delve into my artistic process. My approach is a delicate balance between methodical planning and spontaneous inspiration. Ideas emerge spontaneously, laying the groundwork for compositions that intricately weave together ethics, harmony, and nature. I meticulously document these ideas, relying on words and descriptive sentences to form the basis for my visual illustrations, often fusing images in the form of allegories or a string of metaphors to craft compelling narratives.

During the preliminary stages, I sketch out individual components, utilizing acetate sheets or tracing paper to seamlessly merge them into cohesive environments or compositions, always mindful of the principles and elements of art. My painting style involves a fusion of geometric and organic shapes, enhanced by solid harmonious colors and occasional gradients for nuanced experiences. Varied line-weight serves as a tool for suggesting spatial dimensions and movement, while wash and dry brush techniques introduce diversity.

The strategic use of shades and black serves to enhance focal

points, intricately woven with detailed patterns. My exploration goes beyond traditional mediums; it extends into the realm of higher technology. I've even ventured into experimenting with robotic reinterpretations of my artworks, seamlessly integrating traditional tools with the latest technologies.

Operating within the realm of indirect art, my objective is to construct narratives that are perceived through the senses, contributing to humanity through the storytelling arts. My focus is on crafting messages that are both ethical and meaningful, with the belief that art should carry intrinsic value and intellectual depth. It transcends mere aesthetics; it should be a profound reflection shared with others. My work embodies a stylized form of symbolist art, embracing creative freedom to convey interconnected ideas through representational imagery, varying line-weight, and the interplay of organic and geometric shapes. This synthesis encapsulates the essence of my artistic process, philosophy, and the unique blend of elements found in my work.

Where do you find inspiration for your work?

I draw inspiration from the vibrant palette of gardens and the delicate beauty of blooming flowers, finding creative fuel in the intricate wonders of nature. Living in South Florida, aptly named 'La Florida' or 'place of flowers,' fueled my passion for nature, meanwhile providing solace in the garden. Additionally, my fascination with architectural intricacies, natural forms, and the interplay of lines and patterns is rooted in a profound love for gardening inherited from my late father. Marveling at the towering buildings of New York during my youth also fueled this fascination.

My art draws inspiration from diverse sources, reminiscent of medieval craftsmanship and the primal expressiveness found in cave art, symbolist stories, and

Egyptian hieroglyphs. From the pursuit of the greater good and the sacred geometry of patterns to the stoic principles of virtue, my work embodies a quest for human flourishing, self-actualization, and ancient wisdom. Gathering insights from profound thinkers like Sam Harris and Sadhguru, I embark on the complex task of translating these ideas into visual and written expressions.

As a woman, I find empowerment in stories like *Ever After*, *The Legend of Billie Jean*, *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken*, and *Shadow in the Cloud*, considering them utilitarian in shaping my perspective. The motivational insights of Tony Robbins and Les Brown, the imaginative world of Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone*, and Jim Henson's European folk tale series, *The StoryTeller*, all contribute to my creative landscape. Empowered by stories conveying great ideas and simple truths, I strive to pass down this wisdom from generation to generation through my visual artworks and creative writings. In essence, my art is a tapestry woven with diverse influences, reflecting a profound connection to nature, a commitment to passing down wisdom, and a celebration of empowerment through storytelling.

Is there a piece you consider a "breakthrough" in your career?

The foundations of my artistic style were laid during high school, evolving, and fusing into an allegorical style in college, which I later paid particular attention to and described after graduating in 2011. Reflecting on my life's work, the piece that has become a staple in my body of work is "Time Flies," created in Victoria Skinner's class (www.vskinner.com), which was gifted to a small business owner a few years after. Completed in 2010, this piece, executed in markers, acrylic, India ink, and graphite on Crescent Watercolor Board, measures 20 x 30 inches. "Time Flies" holds a special place in my

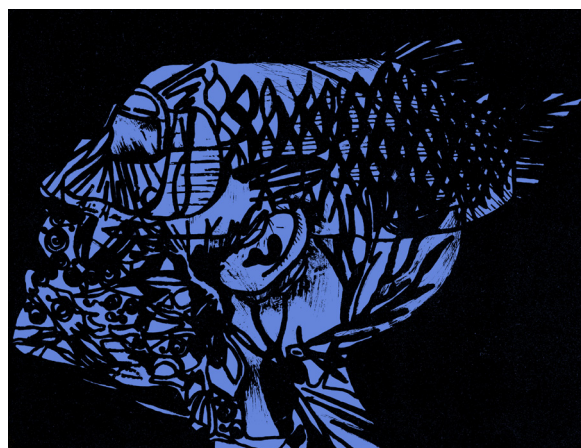
artistic journey, symbolizing both a milestone and the enduring influence of my formative years.

Victoria assisted me in composing my ideas by introducing me to acetate sheets and tracing paper, allowing me to seamlessly merge a narrative through my preliminary work. Suddenly, the aesthetic and intellectual appeal of my works since high school began to make sense. In early 2023, I recreated a symbol from "Time Flies," which I incorporated into a pair of pieces, one featuring a robotic arm and the other without: "Witnessing Tatlin's Tower" and "Golden Staircase." In "Witnessing Tatlin's Tower," Tatlin's tower is used to describe the quest for fulfilling unattainable (or hard-to-achieve) ideas! "Golden Staircase," made with Robohood Inc.'s technology, expresses my journey in the arts by creating a reinterpretation of my artwork, "Witnessing Tatlin's Tower."

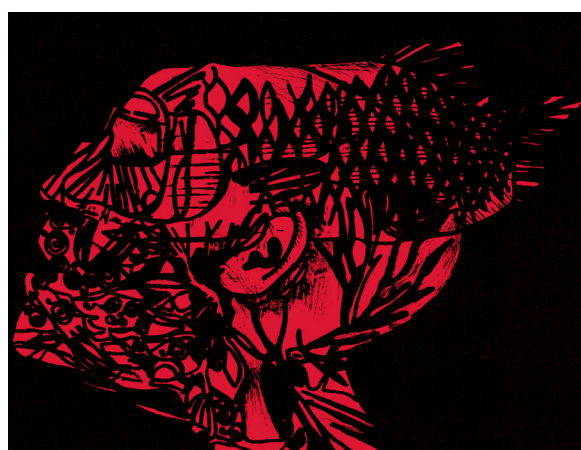
"Golden Staircase" was selected and is displayed in Southwest Florida International Airport's concourse for a period of six months from September 2023 to February 2024.

Nevertheless, the passing of my father in January 2021 also became a catalyst for me to reassess and confront my creative ambitions. Additionally, my involvement with the National Society of Leadership and Success provided valuable knowledge and skills, culminating in 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.

Do you have a role model from which you have drawn inspiration when creating your art?



Le Poisson Bleu, Fine Art Print On Aluminum Dibond, 12 x 9 in, 2023 © Melissa Allegories



Le Poisson Rouge, Fine Art Print On Aluminum Dibond, 12 x 9 in, 2023 © Melissa Allegories

In my creative journey, I have opted for an unconventional approach, steering away from a single role model to draw inspiration from a myriad of sources. Instead of fixating on one person, I often contemplate the question, "What would prudence do?" as a guiding principle for thoughtful decision-making in life, recognizing the challenges inherent in embodying such a virtue.

Despite this atypical approach to inspiration, I acknowledge my existence as a product of society, shaped by a multitude of inherited ideas and traits, both behavioral and physical, communicated through diverse channels. Living in an interconnected era, I intuitively interpret information, be it proven facts or fiction, relying on my senses to navigate the vast sea of perspectives. However, in the complex adventure of absorbing the emotions and viewpoints of others, I've occasionally lost sight of my authentic self.

To address this, I have learned to guard my senses, choosing my influences with care to mold my creative process and worldview intentionally. It is a conscious effort to sift through the myriad inputs of our interconnected era, ensuring that I curate my own influences. While avoiding a single role model, I have recently discovered inspiration in various figures, including influential thinkers, artists, and creators. Tim Burton's imaginative creations, particularly "Alice in Wonderland," deeply resonate with me. Additionally, delving into J.R.R. Tolkien's fantastic realms, especially "The Hobbit," has become a recent source of inspiration.

What are you working on now, and what are your plans for the future? Anything exciting you can tell us about?

Embarking on a transformative journey from craftsmen to originators and creators, my artistic path has seen years of stagnation and unexpected detours,

finally aligning with my goals in 2023. I am thrilled to share the exciting news that I was honored with the Broward County Cultural Division's Artist Support Grant in September 2023, a recognition that both challenges and rewards me on my artistic journey.

My ongoing project, *Melissa Allegories*, is an evolving narrative unfolding across five interconnected worlds, each presenting unique characters and settings intricately interwoven to convey a myriad of metaphors. This evolving collection comprises five interconnected worlds within an overarching realm named *Lében*, the German word for Life. These worlds—*At the Garden*, *The Deep-Sea*, *Caged-City*, *Inside the Cave*, and *The Electric Forest*—serve as distinct settings, each contributing to a rich tapestry of metaphors exploring secular principles and values.

Central to *Lében*, "At the Garden" explores human values like hope, inspiring self-actualization, and human flourishing. This narrative delves into themes of personal growth and enlightenment through temperance, emphasizing harmony within us and manifesting "the greater good" in the tangible world. *Eudaimonia*, a central concept in Aristotle's ethics, translates to "human flourishing." It is a holistic pursuit involving material well-being, ethical character, social cohesion, psychological well-being, autonomy, and cultural considerations. "At the Garden" considers the notion of *eudaimonia* and focuses on temperance, harmony, enlightenment, self-actualization, and human flourishing within different garden settings.

Currently set to unfold across five chapters, "At the Garden" offers glimpses into different facets of this captivating narrative. Chapters include "The Iris Family: Wings of Adversity," "Roots of Sanctuary: A Golden Eagle's Odyssey," "A Kingdom's Fall: ScarCity Saga," "Shattered Utopia: A Saga Unveiled," and "Gar-

den Revelations: Love's Awakening and Freedom's Echo." By offering the first five chapters for free along with a booklet of insights via <https://www.visualwriting.art/at-the-garden.html>, my aim is to provide you, the audience, with a captivating glimpse into the depth and richness of my narrative. My hope is to enhance the overall experience for you by combining illustrations, audio elements, and potentially offering prints and the complete novel for sale in the near future. Additionally, I am excited about the prospect of an on-site exhibition in Broward County, Florida, in 2024, adding another layer to our shared artistic journey.

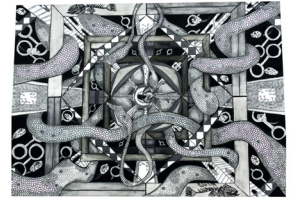
Lastly, what is your biggest career goal or dream?

Recognizing the significance of both micro and macro goals, I find it essential to celebrate every accomplishment along the way. Taking a moment to step back, I give myself a gentle pat on the back for the progress made and the milestones achieved. It is a reminder never to undervalue oneself.

I realized my dream by establishing Smile Sweet Sunflower LLC on July 13, 2022, enabling me to pursue my grand idea. My aspiration extends to collaborating with a publishing company and/or animation studio, envisioning the transformation of my artistic expressions into widely shared narratives. While acknowledging the necessity of sustaining my artistic endeavors, I have discovered that creating art solely for commercial purposes feels distinctly different from crafting art to convey something profound. Hence, prioritizing financial gain cannot compromise the aesthetics and meaning behind my work; maintaining the original intention to share insights and meaningful messages for a more just world is paramount. Despite the challenges, the most crucial aspect is persevering and aligning with like-minded individuals and opportunities that foster

thriving.

Nevertheless, the shaping of my self-esteem and self-worth has been influenced by supportive figures and the challenges encountered in both personal and professional spheres. Love and career experiences have imparted invaluable lessons, distinguishing between short-term and long-term pleasures. Engaging in a diverse range of jobs has granted me a broader perspective, contributing to both my personal and professional growth.



Deep Seeds, Warm and Cool Markers, India Ink, Graphite on Cold Press Watercolor Board, 30 x 40 in, 2010 © Melissa Allegories



Time Flies, Markers, Acrylic, India Ink, Graphite on Crescent Watercolor Board, 20 x 30 in, 2010 © Melissa Allegories



Growth Mindset (Enhanced), Graphite Drawing, Uni-Posca Paint Markers, Premier Grade Photo-color CMYK Inkjet Ink, Acrylic on Illustration Board, 10 x 8 in, 2022 © Melissa Allegories