

MELISSA ALLEGORIES



Hi Melissa, what are you inspired by?

We are everything we are exposed to; we are reflections of the universe! We are everything we do and absorb, and our beliefs, ideas, and thoughts are the underlying premises of our actions. Since I was a child, I always felt the desire to do something bigger than myself.



When I was about 12 years old, I enjoyed reading through an old collection of The World Book Encyclopedia and I ripped out pages 33 to 78, articles regarding art history. I still have those pages!

I grew fond of the statement, "What distinguishes a good artist is understanding." (WORLD BOOK, INC.) To me this meant discernment.

Books are sacred, indirect functional works of art and the origin of storytelling began with visual stories (e.g., cave art). Studies show that long after cuneiform on wax tablets and text on papyrus rolls, the Greeks created the oldest surviving codex or handwritten manuscript.

There were scribes and illuminators working on these sacred books, using gold and silver metals.

Artist-Philosopher & Visual Writer (SSS LLC Founder)

I'm passionate about the storytelling arts and fascinated by medieval art (illuminators and scribes that work on manuscripts and panels); I love iridescence or work that illuminates and accentuates details. I have affinity for allegories (layers and layers of metaphors/meaning) from all over the world! My 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. I have always had a fascination with antiquities or hidden treasures.

I was the only weirdo growing up who watched Sarah Brightman and other opera singers on WLRN-TV, a PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) which is known as South Florida's storyteller, public television station. I loved every minute of it! I would wait for all the lengthy advertisements or infomercials to pass to watch these theatrical performances.

My mother thought it was funny and unusual behavior or eccentric. However, my recently departed father had an inclination for the arts, particularly music and poetry!

He would sing his own songs and chant his own poems. I also slowly acquired his love for gardening (as a visual art form).

I watched Rod Serling's science fiction television series, The Twilight Zone, influenced by Surrealism and Jim Henson's European folk tale television series, The StoryTeller, influenced by Greek Mythology.

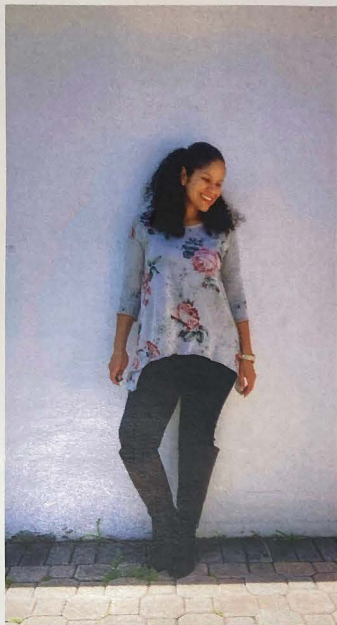
Eventually, I would turn to listening to bits and pieces of Les Brown's motivational stories, Sam Harris' philosophical views, and Sadhguru's wisdom regarding inner engineering and intelligence.

I enjoy gathering information/wisdom from others (e.g., like Sam Harris and Sadhguru), then finding ways to share it with the visual arts and the written word. It's a complicated task that has caused me to reassess my approach several times.

I have titled myself as an "artist-philosopher," because I have spent a lot of time thinking deeply about life. My vocation and endeavors are to create aesthetically pleasing and intellectual works of art and support services that positively impact humanity.

I love stories that feel empowering, especially as a woman.





I found movies like *The Legend of Billie Jean*, *Wild Hearts Can't Be Broken*, and *Shadow in the Cloud* to be uplifting, thus utilitarian or useful in my life. Lastly, I would listen to "Epic Music" and watch superhero films, in general.

I am motivated and inspired by these great ideas/stories and simple truths that are rewritten; as a result, they are passed down from generation to generation, as a means to improve the quality of our lives. In my lifetime, these are things that I've absorbed and hope to portray in my visual artworks and creative writings.

Alright, so let's move onto what keeps you busy professionally?

Art With A Higher Purpose

I use art and design as a vehicle to communicate meaningful, essential messages! For me, the main thing is the idea. Skills and tools are just a part of an aesthetic delivery. Nevertheless, art is a reflection of the artist; thus, a glimpse of society.

Artists aesthetically pleasing and intellectual creations reflect our culture, values, and human experience. Throughout the ages, each culture, movement, or period has visually expressed who they are and what they value.

For example, the Greeks/Romans highly valued the body and philosophical thinking which is seen in Greco-Roman art. Nowadays, contemporary art is innovative: manifesting new trends through cultivating a style or way of creating that is authentic to the artist. Because every artistic expression is tied to the identity of the creator, it is important for every artist to align their style with their interests in a way that feels good and true, or in accordance with who they are and what they hope to communicate.

I have also found that making art solely for commerce feels very different than making art to communicate something meaningful. Therefore, making a living from it cannot be a priority, if it changes the aesthetics and meaning behind it; in other words, one's original intention for creating. Regardless of the outcome, the most challenging thing is not giving up with continuous effort to prioritize the business venture, keeping the door open to multiple streams of income, and staying in alignment with like-minded people and opportunities that will allow thrivingness. Additionally, every micro goal is just as important as the macro goal. It has been essential for me to step back every now and then and just give myself a gentle pat on the back for how far I have come and how much I have accomplished. Never let yourself be undervalued!

I was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, with ancestry in the Dominican Republic. From an early age, I loved looking up at tall buildings. As time went by, I grew in awe with natural forms. I was fond of architectural intricacies and saw the world in lines and patterns. And I slowly acquired my recently departed father's love for gardening (as a visual art form). I am interested in intricate and subtle details, as I take pleasure in creating a stylized form of symbolist art.

I approach my work methodically, but ideas originate sporadically like a mind-pop. The framework of each composition is a derivative of intuitive, interconnected ideas that I express allegorically with originality and socio-cultural influences. I focus on ethics, harmony, and nature and utilize a push and pull technique. All works of art have a (social, aesthetic, cultural, or utilitarian) function, although its cause cannot always be distinguished. My art is indirect (or perceived through the senses). And my approach is to serve humanity through human ingenuity with the storytelling arts.

SHOUTOUT MIAMI

I mix creative writings and/or written ideas with representations through the use of the literary device *allegoria* (ἄλληγορία): veiled or figurative language. My studio and written work combines imagery with a variety of artistic techniques, from which I construct a (semi-)hidden narrative. The gradually expanding body of work titled, *MelissAllegories*, is a cohesive narrative art collection that connects the visual studio arts with short stories. It is made up of five groups/worlds within one world called, *Lében* (German for Life): *At the Garden*, *The Deep-Sea*, *Caged-City*, *Inside the Cave*, and *The Electric Forest*.

"At the Garden" is at the forefront or takes precedence over the other worlds in *Lében*. Each group takes place in a different setting with different main characters which are all interconnected, and together they will represent a multiplied number of metaphors that are combined to communicate secular, ethical and logical principles. Overall, my expansive project *MelissAllegories* which is at the core of my vocation as an artist, focuses on personal growth and/or enlightenment, contemplation and discernment (or deep thoughts), protection versus power and mind-control, the art of writing or solving codes, and embracing ambiguity (or the unknowable). Each setting (or composition) mixes in animals, mammals, and/or sea creatures.

The growing narrative speaks of human values, such as hope, as a means to positively inspire others towards reaching self-actualization; thus, the cultivation of human flourishing. I established my artist business name, *Smile Sweet Sunflower LLC*, on the 13th of July, 2022, so that I can continue to move forward with my big idea. I am a member of *The National Society of Leadership and Success*; thus, this concept arose from the final "Better Me Better World" project which led to the completion of my *Executive Leadership Certification* program.



Being a leader is about being an influential person; as a result, inspiring and enabling others for the greater good.

Any places to eat or things to do that you can share with our readers? If they have a friend visiting town, what are some spots they could take them to?

Geometric patterns are found in nature and most mechanical things are a form of biomimicry. Despite the continuous evolution of technology, humans are innately drawn to nature; this is called the biophilia hypothesis. We are in a symbiotic relationship with the tools we create and the physical environment. It is deemed essential for engineers to continue to develop more human-centered designs. Ergo, digital/robotic artists should create ethical works of art that serve humanity.

By the same token, it is vital for traditional artists to preserve the use of physical, non-digital mediums. I am not fearful of the misuses of AI, because I have hope and believe in our capabilities to constantly aim towards the greater good. I think most of us want to invest our time and energy into ethical works of art and designs that serve humanity. I have delved into higher forms of technology where I see fit (e.g., selling fine art prints and exploring robotic reinterpretations of my artworks).

When I first reached out to Robohood, Inc., I thought I was merely going to be a part-time artist's assistant. The unexpected happened and I took on the role of the Collaborating /Cooperating Artist, opposed to an assistant. The technology has improved drastically from early 2022 (when the company first established themselves in the US) to when I was contracted in February, 2023.

Although I am leaning off my work with Robohood Inc. and ready to keep my open door to new opportunities and adventures (while I continue to pursue my creative endeavors with Smile Sweet Sunflowers LLC.), we will definitely have to take a stop by the robotic art studio and/or any upcoming events throughout the week. In any way, shape or form, the creation of art through the use of both higher and lower technologies have value. We can find harmony between preserving traditional approaches and futuristic configurations.

Another sciencey thing we must do is visit the Fox Observatory at Markham Park, in Sunrise, Florida. I am intrigued by the latest innovations in technology; however, I consider myself a traditional artist who works in a non-conformist way. I'm interested in approaching the use of physical, non-digital mediums in a way that pays homage to the medieval arts with a secularism mindset, in a contemporary era. Hence, we will have to visit Fort Lauderdale Beach, Hugh Taylor Birch State Park, and Bonnet House Museum & Gardens.

The Bonnet House Museum & Gardens is a historical home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, which perfectly fuses my love for art and nature with many wonderful events and/or engaging activities available. Myapapaya Juicery + Kitchen, one of the best places to eat, is not too far from there either.

The Shoutout series is all about recognizing that our success and where we are in life is at least somewhat thanks to the efforts, support, mentorship, love and encouragement of others. So is there someone that you want to dedicate your shoutout to?

Striving For Excellence Since 1999

On entering High School, I began writing creative short stories and poems and drawing from observation, while I continued to use my imagination to explore a variety of styles and techniques.



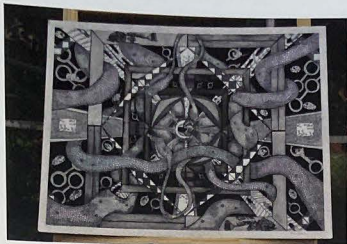
I began to write and draw almost every day throughout my four years in High School from 1999 to 2003. On the 12th day of February in 2003, Jacqueline Downey, my former Studio and Drawing A.P. Teacher at Piper High School, wrote a letter of recommendation stating:

“I am writing this recommendation on behalf of Melissa Hernandez, my student for the past four years, in art and advanced A.P. art at Piper H.S. Melissa has the enthusiasm for two people, at least! Her persistent energy and constant work ethic is astonishing. Melissa faces and overcomes challenges that others would shrink from!

Melissa has a forceful positive attitude about herself, her world, others, her artwork, and her future. She is truly committed to making a difference. Melissa's art skill improves and changes constantly because she pushes the edges all the time... A little further each time... Taking risks with the principles of art and the elements of design.

Melissa takes charge of color and line as no other student I have ever had. It is a pleasure to watch her delve deeply into her work and pull out what she pulls out of herself through her art. I recommend Melissa with the utmost respect and confidence in her future.”





In 2008, Jan Johnson, my former drawing teacher from Broward College, recognized my talent and empowered me to enter the Bachelor of Arts (BA in Studio Art) program at FAU to advance my creative skills. In the fall of 2010 (when I attended Narrative Drawing at FAU with my former instructor, Vicki Skinner), my works' aesthetic and intellectual appeal suddenly began to make sense. In 2011, I completed my Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art from Florida Atlantic University concentrating on drawing, painting, and printmaking.

What I was doing since high school fused into an allegorical style which I've paid particular attention to and described, after graduating in 2011. The proudest moments I've ever felt are the moments where I experienced triumph or desired results, after years of exploring a variety of styles and techniques in the field of art. Factors consist of meeting quality standards, as well as social acceptance or approval. Victoria Skinner (www.vskinner.com) was very kind and interested in what I can do. In 2016, Victoria wrote:

"I am very pleased to write this letter of support for Melissa Hernandez. Melissa was a student of mine in two drawing classes at Florida Atlantic University. While it was a few years ago, I remember her and her work ethic very clearly. Melissa was one of the hardest working, most focused students I have ever had, and I have been teaching at the college level for over 25 years. I emphasize creative solutions to visual and conceptual problems presented in class. Students are encouraged to gather resources and present many preparatory drawings before making the finished piece.



Website: visualwriting.art

Melissa always did an excellent job with this and accomplished more than the other students who were content with the minimum. Her sketchbooks were numerous and reflected her thought process and hard work."

Elizabeth, also known as Liz, Atzberger (www.lizatz.com) was my teacher for my senior portfolio, as well as Painting II. She pushed us to develop our vision! After graduating, I continued to build on my artistic thoughts or ideas. Nevertheless, I felt lucky to have gone to school for art. I have always been predominantly skilled in "Line Art" because that was what I could afford going up. And that's how I started to see the world; I saw lines and patterns, before I saw shapes as forms!

When I focused on shapes as forms (instead of as a series of lines and patterns) and light, I realized that lines do not exist. Lines are created when there's a contrast, or a distinction between lights and shadows.

I learned that when Liz Atzberger told me that she was terrible with lines and/or patterns; thus, she sees shapes!

In 2016, Liz wrote: "I am writing on behalf of Melissa Hernandez, a former student of mine at Florida Atlantic University. I had the pleasure of having Ms. Hernandez in my Painting course. She proved to be a top pupil in that class, despite not having taken many painting courses previously. She excelled in the course due to her talent, enthusiasm and diligent work ethic. She showed leadership by taking risks and helping her fellow students. Her work was superior to that of many other art majors that I have taught at various institutions."

A lot has happened a little over a decade, since completing my Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art from Florida Atlantic University concentrating on drawing, painting, and printmaking, in 2011. Many of my teachers have played a pivotal role in my life, including and not limited to my former printmaking instruction from FAU, Juana Valdes. With great insight into education reform and 21st century teaching and learning, Jeannette Verboom, a professor in the Education department at Broward College, inspired and enabled me to strengthen my research and writing skills.

Through receiving a graduate certificate (in 2020), I was introduced to The National Society of Leadership and Success (NSLS).

Instagram: [melissallegories](https://www.instagram.com/melissallegories)

SHOUTOUT MIAMI

I worked hard to meet the criteria for each culminating project or activity and the feedback I received from LaShaundra Randolph, Manager of Education Instruction & Deployment, meant a great deal to me. I am proud to be a member of the Broward-College North Campus Chapter.



Although I was able to build my self-esteem and self-worth through supporting figures and my diligence with academics, my hard fall with love and career building deserves a lot of credit too. In pursuit of my vocation, while working for a living and during the ins and outs of romantic love, every person I have encountered has kept me humble. Former love interests have taught me a lot about short-term versus long-term pleasures and taking on a diverse range of jobs have given me a broader perspective.



Facebook: [smilesweetsunflower](https://www.facebook.com/smilesweetsunflower)