

MY ABSTRACT HEART FELL IN LOVE!

AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST SHARI EPSTEIN



BY TARA COLLINS AKA TWISTED T

When I first saw Shari Epstein's work my abstract heart fell in love! Shari and her mixed-media collages have been on my radar for several years. However, I had never met her until preparing for this article. Shari's artwork is elegant and refined, yet edgy and contemporary. Right now, the series that Shari is working on is a bird series, called, "Avian". She acquired a beautiful set of fine paper napkins which became the main star of the collages. Once those napkins are gone though, that series is done and she will move on to a new series of fabulous work.

What brought you to create the art that you make?

So many of the ideas behind my work are from influences from 50 years ago when I attended college. I seem to circle back to those things that I always found fascinating. For example, I went to Jamaica and painted paper, tore up the paper and made seascape collages out of them. The colors reminded me of Matisse. I am still making those today out using fabric.

I refer to my work as "collage painting" because it is the interaction of the two that interests me. Collage and paint converge as elements of old and new, stasis and movement all existing in an abstract equilibrium. The collage elements are by nature and reflections of the past. Because they are repurposed materials, they can conjure up memories. I use clothing patterns for their color and graphics. The parchment color gives the collages an aged look. Other collage materials include sheet music, handmade papers and printed images from books and magazines. I also use graphic elements like lists, numbers, arrows which gives the work structure and directs your attention around the page. I then add bright abstract applications of paint and crayon, making marks with deliberate spontaneity.

Where do you work out of?

I have a studio in Miami Beach where I live three months of the year. Those months are my artist residency where I am able to complete a full body of work. The rest of the year, I have a studio in my home in Long Branch. Because I am often distracted by gardening and family, I paint with a group of abstract artists regularly.

What inspires you?

I am inspired by nature, plain and simple. There is nothing more mysterious, beautiful or intriguing. Because of that, I really feel the pain of climate change. I have been driven to make work that addresses it in a few series of mine called, "Rising", "Sandy" and "Happenstance".

I would imagine living a couple of blocks away from the ocean in Long Branch and your seaside home in Miami Beach inspired those series?

Yes, definitely! Hurricane Sandy caused flooding in my neighborhood. For the series, "Sandy", I used painted mulberry paper with hurricane related newspaper images. My reaction to it being told through a palette of muddy paint colors and chaotic brush strokes. "Rising" is a series of seascapes merged with images and navigation charts. Their elongated proportion has the calm of an Asian screen painting but the images in the water turn the calm menacing. The sea charts speak of our shifting shores. The paintings reflect an uncertain future and challenge our responsibility as guardians of this planet.

What would you like to see happen in the Monmouth County art community?

It would be marvelous if more spaces existed, a citywide program which uses empty storefront windows, a banner in every mall announcing and celebrating community artists and organizations, school programs to invite artists in the classroom to discuss their work, tech & marketing professionals helping artists of all ages with web design and social marketing and photographers assisting with the photography needs specific to artists. Having this all happen through funding or by volunteers would be incredibly helpful.

Check out Shari's work on her website: www.shariepstein.com & IG: @shari_epstein