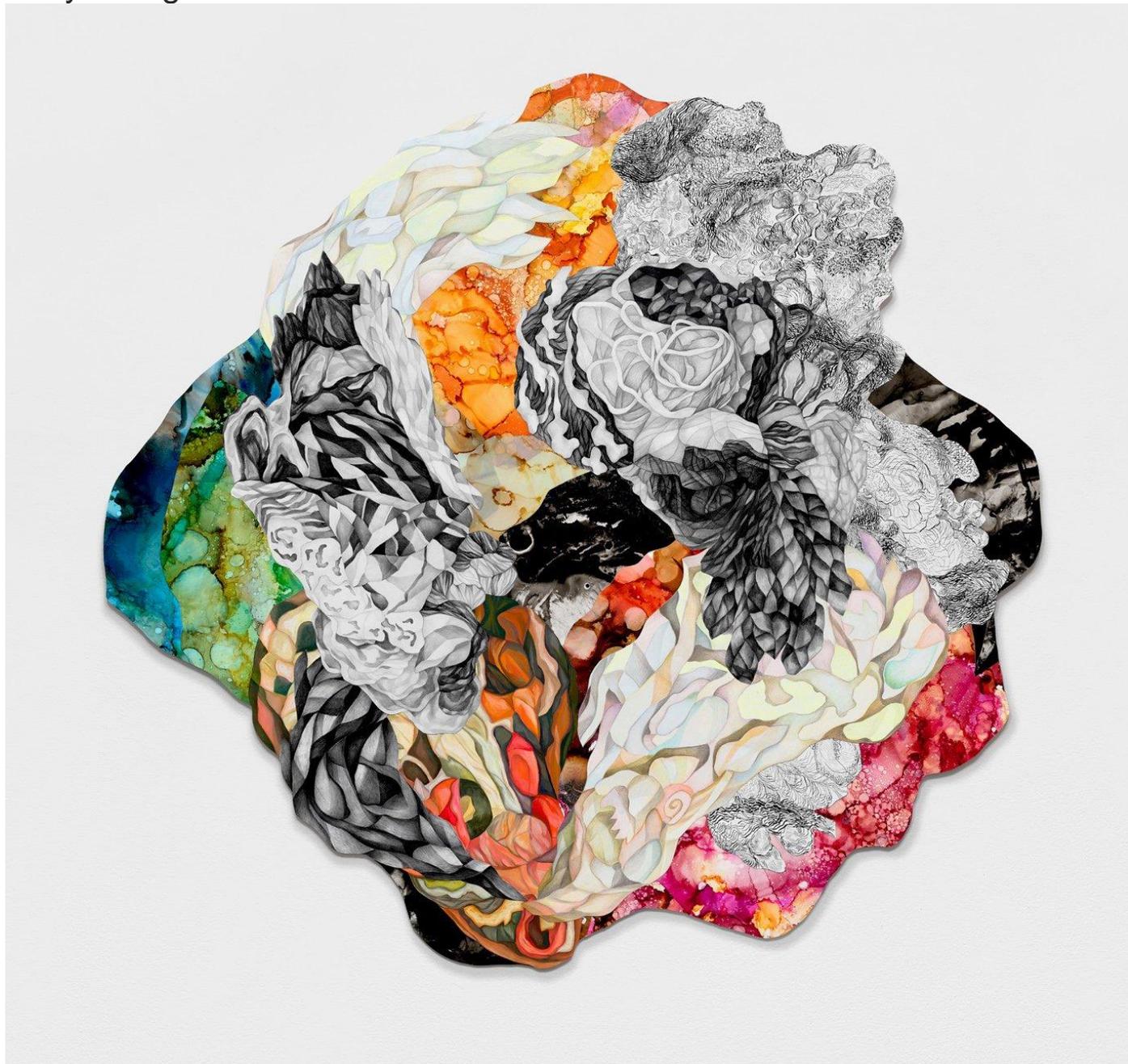


BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

maake

Holly Wong



Amulet 1, 2023. Gouache, oil paint, ink, colored pencil, and graphite on paper and Yupo mounted on dibond panel. 45 x 44 inches

709 Walnut Street 1st Floor Philadelphia PA 19106 tel 215 413 8893 fax 215 413 2283
email bmayer@bridgettemayergallery.com www.bridgettemayergallery.com

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

BIO

Holly Wong (b. 1971, North Miami Beach FLA) creates fiber and drawing-based installations and assemblages that explore grief, mourning and resilience. She was educated at the San Francisco Art Institute where she graduated with a Master of Fine Arts with a concentration in New Genres. Holly has participated in over 80 exhibitions including group shows at the de Young Museum, the Marin Museum of Contemporary Art, Ogden Contemporary Arts, and Maui Arts & Cultural Center. A Presidential Scholar in the Arts, she has received grants from the California Arts Council (Established Artist category), the Puffin Foundation, the George Sugarman Foundation, and the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund. She is represented by SLATE Contemporary Gallery in Oakland, CA, Bridgette Mayer Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, ELLIO Fine Art in Houston, TX, and is a member of A.I.R. Gallery in Brooklyn, NY. Holly lives and works in San Francisco, CA.

ARTIST STATEMENT

I think of this series of paintings as protective amulets. They are made of collaged paintings and drawings on organically shaped aluminum dibond. I love a variety of materials like oil paint, graphite, charcoal, alcohol and acrylic ink, and colored pencil. These works mark a period in my life where I feel I am moving through personal trauma and am starting to see the richness and beauty both in myself and the world around me. I am incorporating aquatic and botanical elements into the imagery but also fragmentation and flux with deeper spaces for grief and introspection. Holding the intention that amulets are treasured items of protection that you carry with you, I created these pieces as a prayer for my own healing as well as the larger world context of conflict and pain around me.

Interview with Holly Wong

Can you tell us a bit about your background and how you became interested in becoming an artist?

I grew up in Miami Florida and went to arts magnet schools where I took several college level art classes. I went to New World School of the Arts, and this was a huge factor in me ultimately becoming an artist. Several family members also encouraged me since my grandfather and uncle had been very artistic.

Can you tell us about some of your most memorable early influences?

I had a high school art teacher named Ed Love who was a major influence. He had come to New World School of the Arts from Howard University to serve as the Dean of Visual Arts. I was a troubled young person, and he showed me how he used his sculptural work as a conduit for social change and transformation. He opened my eyes to the larger world and the depth of suffering and discrimination that people of color experience, but also the ways that art could become a teacher and truth teller.

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



Keeper of the Secrets 4, 2023. Gouache, oil paint, ink, colored pencil, and graphite on paper and Yupo mounted on dibond panel. 43 x 40 inches

709 Walnut Street 1st Floor Philadelphia PA 19106 tel 215 413 8893 fax 215 413 2283
email bmayer@bridgettemayergallery.com www.bridgettemayergallery.com

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

Where are you currently based and what brought you there? Are there any aspects of this specific location or community that have inspired your work?

I am based in San Francisco, California. I came out to the West Coast from Miami to attend my BFA program at the San Francisco Art Institute. I remained out here for my MFA program and then never left. There was something about the dramatic beauty of San Francisco, the progressive politics, and the ways in which being in San Francisco as an artist can be very liberating. It allows me to work organically, to follow my muse and be open ended. While there isn't a lot of professional exposure out here, there also isn't a lot of pressure. I live about 1 mile away from the beach, so water and botanical elements always find their way into my work.

What is your studio space like? What makes your space unique to you?

I work in a spare bedroom of my house which has been great. I can immediately get to work, and it saves on expenses. Our house is two stories, built in the 1940's so there is decent storage in the garage. While it sometimes makes working with messy materials a bit of a challenge, I can just take it out in the yard. Alternatively, if I need a more professional looking space, I will rent studio space in some of the old canning factory buildings where I can set up for a few hours, if need be, for install photography.

What is a typical day like? If you don't have a typical day, what is an ideal day? Do you work in large chunks of time, or throughout the day?

I do work in large chunks of time typically early in the morning. I have a full-time day job doing finance/HR work, so I get up at 2:00am to be in the studio and then work for 3-4 hours before going to work. I do this seven days a week because it is the only way I know of to build momentum. This approach is not for everyone, but I got used to working this way because I had started out as a shift scheduler in a medical emergency room. I watched the residents come in and work at all hours of the night, making life and death decisions. I figured to myself that it was at least possible for me to carve out some studio time by working an alternative schedule. One can say that I work a day and graveyard shift. I get about 6-7 hours of sleep a night and live on coffee. It's not ideal but I won't have to do this forever.

What gets you in a creative groove or flow? Is there anything that interrupts your creative energy?

I do enjoy listening to jazz, and if I am doing focused or tedious activities, I listen to art podcasts or true crime audio books. Social media, email and various admin tasks will interrupt my creative energy so I try to keep that to an absolute minimum unless I have a specific deadline to respond to.

How do you maintain momentum in your practice? Is there anything that hinders or helps your focus?

I maintain momentum by committing myself to working every day, regardless of whether I only have a little bit of time and regardless of whether I feel "creative" or not. Once I get into the studio and start interacting with the materials, the work starts to make itself. It's kind of like finding a vein of gold in the rock and just following it. Looking at other artists' work on social media can be inspiring but if I get into the compare/despair spiral, that hinders my focus.

What medium/media are you working in right now? What draws you to this particular material or method?

I am working on a series of collaged paintings and drawings on shaped aluminum dibond. Collage has always been a major aspect of my practice because it allows me ultimate choice and flexibility. Because fiber and quilting are also a major part of my practice, I do have the approach of creating little sections and then putting them together in a kind of patchwork, whether it is on aluminum or suspended as pieced fabric from the ceiling.

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

Can you walk us through your overall process in making your current work? Does drawing play a role in your process?

Drawing is central to the process of my current work. I start by doing graphite drawings on smooth Bristol paper frankly because I love drawing so much. These drawings then feed into the rest of the elements, and I will often transition to acrylic ink on paper and then move into oil painted sections where I work with thin glazed layers. This way of working is fairly detail orientated so I enjoy the other side of my personality which is about spilling alcohol ink on Yupo paper in the back yard, working with fluid acrylics, or burning paper with candle smoke. I like my materials to have different speeds, weight, and distance all in one piece.

What is exciting about your process currently?

I am rediscovering many things about oil painting that I didn't know as a younger painter, probably because now, I am painting with a deeper level of intention. I am more patient, am willing to wait for the subtle glazes to dry, to give the work what it needs. I never know how these pieces are going to reveal themselves. Techniques I took for granted are being explored anew and I feel like there is a microcosm that can be created in two-dimensional work. While some people know me primarily for my large fiber-based installations, I have also enjoyed the intensive focus of making smaller work recently, which is planned for an upcoming solo show.

Can you talk about some of the ongoing interests, imagery, and concepts that have informed your process and body of work over time? How do you anticipate your work progressing in the future?

As a younger person, I focused my work on processing my trauma, recovering from my post-traumatic stress disorder, and trying to understand the social and cultural roots of violence against women. My work over the years has been both personal and explicitly political. As I have aged, I have continually seen an inward spiral in my work. As I understand more deeply about the facts of my life, I can relate the universal quality of that in my artwork. I want my work to be a place where people can experience their grief but also healing, resilience and transformation.

Patterning has always been important in my work both for what it hides in overlay but also what it reveals. Sometimes I even use crime scene photography and blood spatter patterns as a basis for my drawing, integrating the evidence of violence with the visual artifact. In drawing or painting interlinking images, my mind pauses, judgment is suspended, and I can process the trauma and understand it in a more integrated way. I feel like I am in the mature phase of my work and anticipate I will go deeper and deeper into the unconscious places and hopefully the work will be more ephemeral, layered and experiential for the viewer.

Do you pursue any collaborations, projects, or careers in addition to your studio practice? If so, can you tell us more about those projects, and are there connections between your studio practice and these endeavors?

As a parallel process, I am proposing several multimedia projects where I would collaborate with poets, filmmakers, sound artists, quilters, and mental health professionals to create healing spaces. My goal is for viewers to experience the artwork which focuses on issues of violence against cis and transgender women, but also to be connected with resources in the community to help address this. In conjunction with my exhibitions, I have started to do workshops where I guide participants through art therapeutic exercises, to use art as a tool for finding wholeness. I see these activities as connected to my studio practice. Finally, I participate in several online artist communities where we engage in mutual feedback and support. Connecting with other artists and giving back is important to me.

Have you had any epiphanies recently that have changed the course of your work or caused you to shift directions?

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

I was recently awarded a California Arts Council Fellowship in the Established Artist category. This was a real epiphany and a high point in my career as an artist because up until this point, I had viewed myself as a terrible grant writer and an underdeveloped artist at best. It helped me tremendously to see that others saw me differently. Whenever I am gripped by fear, imposter syndrome or self-doubt, I remember that just because I feel something does not make it true. I am trying to reengineer the stories I tell myself. The more confident I feel, the more productive I am as an artist.



Spell Charm 1, 2023. Gouache, oil paint, ink, colored pencil, and graphite on paper and Yupo mounted on dibond panel. 45 x 44 inches

Can you share some of your recent influences? Are there specific works—from visual art, literature, film, or music — that are important to you?

709 Walnut Street 1st Floor Philadelphia PA 19106 tel 215 413 8893 fax 215 413 2283
email bmayer@bridgettemayergallery.com www.bridgettemayergallery.com

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

My art inspirations include the work of Mary Beth Edelson, Remedios Varo, and Mark Bradford as well as the films of Robert Bresson, Federico Fellini, and Kenji Mizoguchi. In terms of specific works, I would say Mary Beth Edelson's photo montage work *Women Rising* (1973), *Moon Mouth Series* (1973-4), and later *Goddess Head* (1975) are a true North for me. The film *Pickpocket* by Bresson, *Juliet of the Spirits* by Fellini, and *Ugetsu* by Mizoguchi are all deeply inspiring to me.

Can you elaborate on a recent work of yours, and tell us the story of how it came to be?

I think of my collaged paintings on shaped dibond as protective amulets. These works mark a period in my life where I feel I am moving through personal trauma and am starting to see the richness and beauty both in myself and the world around me. I am incorporating aquatic and botanical elements into the imagery but also fragmentation and flux with deeper spaces for grief and introspection. Holding the intention that amulets are treasured items of protection that you carry with you, I created these pieces as a prayer for my own healing as well as the larger world context of conflict and pain around me.

Have you overcome any memorable roadblocks or struggles in your practice that you could share with us?

When I was younger, I struggled with anorexia as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Like many artists, I had to learn to work with mental illness and somehow come out the other side of it. At the same time as all this was happening, I was working at a series of highly stressful day jobs that sapped my focus in the studio. After several years of struggling, I walked away from high paying jobs because I had to prioritize my artistic voice and the happiness of family life. I have never regretted this choice. I learned that if you live a life that is not yours, you will never be truly happy. My artwork started to flourish once I received the mental health treatment I needed, and now I am back and stronger than ever before.

Who are some contemporary artists you're excited about? Is there a recent exhibition that stood out to you?

Some of my favorite contemporary artists working today are Christina Massey @cmasseart, Laura Sallade @laura.sallade, Bonny Leibowitz @bonnyleibowitz, Etty Yaniv @etty.yaniv, William Powhida @williampowhida, Will Hutnick @willhutnick, Mia Pearlman @mia_pearlman, Kira Dominguez Hultgren @kiradominguezhultgren, Jutta Haeckel @juttahaeckel, Natalie Ball @natalie_m_ball and Rachel Hayes @rachelbhayes

In terms of exhibitions, think of the remarkable solo show of Natalie Ball's work titled *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Snake* at the Seattle Art Museum in 2019. Her work is such a powerful combination of truth telling and reclamation. It is of course great art, but it is also an incredible testament to resilience and the refusal to disappear.

Do you have any tips or advice that someone has shared with you that you have found particularly helpful?

The best advice I have received is always to follow the ideas in my work and not be attached to the materials. I never have to pick one path or another, that the goal is to make work that is true to my values. For any of this to happen though, I must be in the studio, regardless of whether something wonderful happens or not. I must be present for whatever comes.

What are you working on in the studio right now? What's coming up next for you?

Right now, I am working on a series of 36x36 collaged works on shaped aluminum dibond. At this smaller scale, it encourages me to work with delicacy and focus. These pieces will be part of a solo exhibition at Bridgette Mayer Gallery in Philadelphia, opening in November of 2024. I will also have some suspended fiber and LED works in the show plus a large drawing installation. I will also be showing my multimedia work *Mending Body/Mending Mind* at A.I.R. Gallery in Brooklyn in November of 2024. So much to do but I am so excited about it!

BRIDGETTE **MAYER** GALLERY

Anything else you would like to share?

Thank you so much for selecting my work for Maake Magazine. I love following you on Instagram and the artists you curate into the shows and catalogs are just remarkable. I feel so honored to be included in issue 16!!

To find out more about Holly Wong check out her [website](#) and [Instagram](#).