I have been an artist my entire adult life, and before that a maker, a gatherer, a tinker, a what-if-we did it this way kind of girl. I was the kid in your school who always did the bulletin boards and transformed the gym or where-ever into what-ever any time it was needed. Transforming what I see around me into something else has been my job pretty much my whole life.

I was 4 years old and living in Forest City, NC when my father gave me a gift. We were there because my Dad was a textile engineer in a factory called Stone Cutter Mills. One evening he came home from work early to take me and my older brother Penn to a carnival in a local ballpark.

While we were excitedly rushing (me probably jumping) around putting on our coats and getting ready, He said “Missy, come over here, I want to show you something.” He pulled a small shiny black object out of his coat pocket. It unfolded into what I now know is a textile magnifier. It you have never seen one, these are magic pieces of plastic and glass that fit together so that you can put your eye against the hole at one end and see fabric magnified through the lens at the other end.

He held the object up to his grey tweed jacket and told me to look through the open circle in the top end. “Here Missy, look and tell me what you see,” he said. What I saw looked like another world. Somehow that rough grey fabric had become a magic place. As a grown-up I now imagine it as a place like the streets of New York, full of color and light with sun bouncing off of every window. Never, had I ever imagined such a world of wonder. Each individual thread was made of what seemed like a million smaller threads of color and light all twisted together and woven after that. His grey coat contained a magic cosmos under magnification, as beautiful as anything I had ever seen, maybe even to this day. Layer upon layer of small particles of thread containing what seemed to be all the colors of the universe twisted together to make a larger whole. All of that in my Daddy’s grey coat.

I did not know then that what he showed me that evening would become the foundation of how I saw the world as I learned to see and understand it. Layer upon layer of smaller systems woven together to make a whole, everywhere all the time. Plants, animals, the very layers of the earth itself are layered complex systems.

As an artist and a sculptor, I look to the natural world to understand how things are made. I like to notice how a seed unfurls and think about how a seashell is formed from the body of the animal inside. If it sounds complex, that's true enough but that's what makes it interesting.

I like to make things and also I like to figure out how things are put together... I love the repetitive motion involved in textiles and so many other daily tasks that make up our world. My art becomes the stories I have to tell using bits and parts of the world around me. I am old enough, that my list is long. I have woven baskets, which morphed into hats which became sculptures. I have told stories of society and culture by collecting and documenting what I find around me. At one point in my artistic career, I had over 100,000 bottlecaps collected by friends and neighbors. The sociologist in me thought of them as marks of consumption. The artist in me saw their colors and shapes as a palette. The teacher and activist in me organized community after community to design and make mandalas out of them. Like flowers opening, each one different than the one before

Here is what I know. I watch the world around me and try to understand it. Mostly I use found and discarded objects to depict the world I see. If I am lucky, what I make allows the people who see my work to pay closer attention to the world around them. On my best days, that is what I am doing. Looking closely and being amazed, like my Daddy showed me all those years ago.

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