

**At Peace With
Melissa Forbes
By Amy Karrmann**

Melissa Forbes is an artist, yogini, author, teacher, & world traveler. I was amazed at all of her accomplishments. Her solo exhibition on October 23rd at the the Art School of Columbia County is not to be missed!

How did you get to this place where painting mandalas is your primary subject? A way of releasing anxiety perhaps?

Mandala and Yantra has been a major focus, but my primary subject throughout my life has been the spiral, which is found in a mandala. I was led that way because of my interest in yoga and desire to understand. I'm a visual person, so studying the yoga sutras wasn't the best way. I was looking at tantric art and the symbols, the simplicity of the shapes I could understand. And then I found out there was the yantra – A Yantra is visual diagram of the light or energy patterns of a deity/planet; the yantra becomes the dwelling - activating the right hemisphere, while the mantra activates the left hemisphere. Combined they allow the energy to move higher in the body, increasing inner silence. I have always, always, drawn the spiral. The spiral is found in the body. If you think of DNA and the Fibonacci spiral and move on to the 'flower of life' and just the Sacred Geometry of all these simple shapes contain the building blocks of the Universe, exciting. I explore these things because they're calming, and they help me understand life and the universe.

It seems the process of painting is as important as the subject and the final piece...

Creating the work puts you in a very clear space. It's a form of yoga and of concentration, a practice. Everything kind-of drops away and you're just one with what is. The mind is calm.

Can you draw some comparisons between your yoga teachings and your art teachings. In other words, how do you tell your students to approach a piece? What should they be thinking about - or not thinking about? To look inward?

It's about centering and dropping into the self and connecting to the subject. There are ways to calm the nervous system so we can be peaceful. Not reacting, just responding to life. It's good to have lots of different tools. It's more about affecting the autonomic nervous system, so we calm down, breath, relax, de-stress and heal. When you're creating the yantra, first you'd start to chant because the ancients 2,000 years ago went into deep meditation, and they focused on the subject. They heard sounds, remembered them and they were transferred orally. Repeated the chant, light diagrams were formed from the sound. Keep chanting while creating. The idea is to hook back into the chant when distracted to focus and align to the subject. Such as the Sun, Jupiter, Durga or what every energy you want to harness. When finished you have a visual diagram that can be placed in your space to serve.

I see, according to your website, that you are a "world traveler". May I ask where you've been – and how did those places ultimately affect your work – both yoga and artwork? What country did you love the most?

I lived three doors down from the World Trade Center and after 9/11, I eventually left and went to Switzerland. From 2003-2007, I traveled with the philosopher U.G. Krishnamurti and basically lived out of a suitcase. Prior to that I was teaching yoga and I would spend half the year in New Zealand and the other half of the year in New York. Before Covid, I lead a group of people to India to a retreat center and we would create mandalas. When I was younger, I worked as a textile designer which sent me to China and I also worked in London at Phillips, the auction house. I taught in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. I was an adjunct professor at the University of New Haven, CT, a private group from the royal families brought me in to teach art. As a tourist, I liked going to Cambodia – Siem Reap, Angkor Wat. The UNESCO site where the ancient ruins are - 50 temples dating back to the 12th century. Magical!

Have you noticed certain colors have different affects on a person's emotions? How do you approach color in your paintings?

Oh, definitely! Some are energizing, empowering, healing, peaceful, can insight action. The lineage works with numerology. Each number is associated with an archetype, planet, color and gemstone. When creating a personal mandala, dictated by one's date of birth. One has two primary numbers and their associated archetype...along with that is a color. For example, sun is red and that is number one, radiance, success.

(when speaking about approach) With my mandala work, I try to adhere to the tradition. They have pretty set colors for everything. Each color means something and also the shapes. We work with the 9 x 9 table or the Vedic square. I have favorite colors. I'm currently working on new drawings for my upcoming show at the Art School of Columbia County on October 23rd. I tend to use complimentary colors indigo blue and terra cotta. It feels like the earth and sky.

It looks like you prefer oil. Why oil and not acrylic?

I don't work with acrylic much. Other than the acrylic on the warp ends of my weavings. I paint with oil on canvas for my own personal work. When creating mandala, we use gouache primarily and maybe some watercolors. It's flat and opaque and doesn't have an odor.

I see that you started out with Asana and moved to Yantra. What are the differences between the two? Why did you find Yantra more favorable to Asana?

I practice both. Asana translates to "seat" and it's more of what people think of as a yoga practice – doing the physical movements. Yantra is the light diagram that is the dwelling place of whatever you are creating. When I first heard about it, I was completely fascinated by the Sri Yantra, which represents the cosmos. The idea is when you create it, it helps you align everything up in your life and that you understand the journey better.

Your journeys with UG.Krishnamurti sound fascinating. What are the key life lessons that you took away from this experience? What would you like to teach others that you learned through this experience?

He was extraordinary! Considered to be in the “natural” state. He didn’t believe in copyright, own any property, said, “corruption is inherent in all organization”. He didn’t react to a situation he responded. He was completely in the moment. I learned to be flexible and move past the fear of change. We had no schedule. We would decide what we would do for the day that morning. He did not react – he responded. We are so patterned. We are constantly reacting to our surroundings. I don’t lecture or parrot what he said because it would be a denial of myself. He was considered to be a Jivamukti. A liberated being. I do repeat his comments though or share a story.

[Melissa was inspired by UG to offer her abilities through teaching and took his advice to heart. As a result, she published “No Teaching Yoga: The Authentic Guide” – published by Gather Insight in January 2017.]

How did you end up in Chatham, NY? This area seems to be very open to yoga and the meditative arts. Have you found this as well? Is there another area in the United States (or elsewhere) that you would like to teach in, or is this area your primary focus for now?

I had come back from Europe – my father had retired – and I thought I should stay in the country and try to figure out where I wanted to be. After living in the Alps, NYC wasn’t attractive. I wanted to be a coach, so I went to Albany, NY area enrolled in coaching program and then I was interested in ethics and began to study with the Sufi’s at the Abode of the Message and found a place in Old Chatham, NY. It’s a great area and so pretty! I teach all over. As I mentioned, before Covid, in February, I would lead groups to India. Also, during Covid, and even now, I have people from all over the world attend through Zoom – Fiji, South America, New Zealand, Europe.

Where can we find your artwork? Are there galleries you would like to show in soon?

I have had two pieces accepted for the juried show at Spencertown Academy (spencertownacademy.org) opening event 4-6:00pm October 9th, called “Deeper Than The Skin”.

The medium is weaving/tapestry with a pastel background.

<https://spencertownacademy.org/event/deeper-than-the-skin-annual-regional-juried-show/2022-10-15/>

The Art School of Columbia County is giving me a solo exhibition, opening October 23rd.
Melissa Forbes: Healing Threads

I will present an Artist’s Talk from 4:00 – 4:30 p.m.
Opening Reception from 4:30 – 7:00 p.m.

Artist statement:

Melissa Forbes “Weaves her Cherokee blood with the Anglo Saxon, despite the termination of the wisdom culture. Erased as if it has no value. What is the effect of having one’s Culture

terminated?

Interlacing the past threads, flow, harmonize the colors, must understand. Healing to empower the Matriarch. I strive to learn from my Cherokee ancestors. Listen, feel the colors, they have many things to teach”.

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In November, Melissa will host Drawing Your Own Mandala
Tuesdays 9:30 – 11:00 a.m. November 1 – November 22
(information and registration on-line at artschoolofcolumbiacounty.org)

How do we find your yoga teachings?

I teach in-person yoga at Roots Holistic Wellness in Chatham, Friday 9am. Otherwise, I hold Zoom classes for both locals and others around the world. Access to zoom classes can be found on my website www.melissafortbes.art. Please sign up to be on the email for list for updates.
Peace.