



MEDITATIONS ON MY ART

FUTURE AKINS-TILLET

A room from thousands of hours
of sketches and drafts,
of doubts and decisions,
of tears and smiles,
of whys and why nots,
of work by hand,
of work with heart,
swirling around a lifetime of stories.

Healing is a time-consuming, meandering process, filled with moments of unbelievable pain followed by times of incredible joy. It is a solitary journey guided by the whispering cries from a few, haunted by the shadows hiding in the forgotten. There are no easy answers and fewer easy questions. Mainly, it plays havoc with my art.

Inspired by the dancing light from the beads and sequins found in Haitian Voodoo banners, I tell my story. As an artist/feminist/educator, I am all too aware that women are often overlooked or put into a category of non-importance. It is with this understanding that I begin my tale. A true story based on dreams disguised as memories and successes seen as scars. Leaving the formal arena of my education (Masters of Fine Arts in Printmaking), I slide into a gray area that dwells beneath established trends, not really resting with age old crafts but following a path sketched from dreams

My art resides somewhere between the world of formally defined fine arts and the world of traditional crafts, in a territory blended from a respect for process, an impatience with the status-quo, and the love of a good story. Autobiographically romantic, each work allows memories, daydreams, and reality to meander, like the ramblings of a diary, sentimentally seeking absolution for a situations long past. Often, there is humor, sometimes there is only the sly smile of a survivor.

Slowly moving too fast, as I leave behind the marker for fifteen years, I continue to use beads and sequins to tell my tales. In self portraits where my hair is silver now, my body wider, the scars almost gone, and the tattoos flower anew, I change from a warrior betrayed to a woman reclining and dreaming. In my small artist's books, rich in detail and filled with prints or poems, desire or deception I share stories of love wronged and love growing strong. In installations of hope, family alcoholism is exposed as banners tell of the work of recovery. Later, there are small prayer flags asking for blessings for work yet to be done while white handkerchiefs honor those that disappear in times of war, times of confusion.

When a thought, a memory or an idea follows me through my day and into my dreams I know it has to become a piece of art. I sketch and scribble bits and pieces of what might or might not work until I have a final design. I draw it to size, find the cloth necessary for the background, pick my sequins, my beads, and begin. Then it is just a matter of thread

and needle going through the cloth, through a sequin, through a bead, and back through the sequin into the cloth repeated thousands of times. The vision of how the work will be when it is finished: framed, hung on a branch, hung on a ceiling, or made into a small book carries me through the endless calmness required of beads and sequins.

I pride myself on being independent and able to do it “all” (what ever “all” might mean) by myself without asking for or ever expecting help, much less understanding. Yet, I have come to accept that I need, and deserve, and require, and want a soft place to rest, to reside, to recover. It is hard at times to admit that this place for me is West Texas. I may speak of northern New Mexico as the place I first learned to laugh after being widowed, or I can recall the beauty of fall in upper Michigan but in truth, home is on this flatland of endless sky, surprising canyons, and constant wind. This portrait allows lines from laughter and worry, for untamed silver hair, and a morning glory celebrating life unexpected. (See Figure 1).



A Soft Place to Fall by Future Akins-Tillett
beads and sequins, 24” x 49” x 2”

I have tens of books on how to get better, be better, do better. There are notations on the sides of the pages, sticky notes hanging out of the pages and articles that might be useful stuck in-between pages. Yet, the answers, the real answers, not the “could- be” or the “should- be” answers are always waiting for me within my heart. I have hidden from myself, my self. The trees are representative of the beautiful ways I have found to conceal that I so long sought. (See Figure 2.)



Hiding Within by Future Akins-Tillett
beads and sequins, 29” x 42” x 3”

Correspondence regarding this art essay should be addressed to the author at Hattiemay@aol.com