

Artist Statement

Clarissa Callesen

Indra's Net

My work is grounded in materiality. Interaction with material objects is a part of our daily life. Those items range from deeply symbolic to completely disposable. We are all interconnected through commonplace matter. I do not sketch or plan my work, I create by physically interacting with my materials. I search and collect, inspect and experience, touch, and smell, contemplate and see. The process becomes a kind of meditative puzzle to find the connections between the objects. Looking to the way they communicate, either attracting and complimenting or repelling and contradicting. I wish to see past an object's original purpose or identifying qualities and see it as a raw material that communicates in shape, texture, and color.

I like to think of myself as an alchemist using my caldrons of rust and plants to transform the very essence of a discarded object. I like to fool your eye. Creating illusions of rock and bone from fabric and junk making you question what you perceive. Through this alchemy the meaning of the objects becomes malleable and a new identity is constructed. Both physically and emotionally I challenge myself to look critically at what our culture labels as repulsive, scary, or unacceptable. Finding the beauty and value in the trash on the ground and honoring the fertility contained within messy human struggles.

My work is also informed and inspired by the natural world and the inevitable processes of death and decomposition, birth and regrowth. Exploring the parallels between those external processes in nature with the inner environment of our minds and emotions. I am intrigued by the vitality contained within "undesirable" natural environments and processes such as the decomposition of debris into life feeding compost, or the "unsightly" brush and bramble patches that support integral populations. We live in a world of sharp contrast; the beauty of life and creation exists beside pointless destruction and devastating heartache. To live in this world, we must learn to hold the two experiences simultaneously.

Currently, recycled textiles are my primary medium. I love the intimate connection to our daily existence. We wear our favorite shirt until it is threadbare and full of holes. We create life, give birth, and die surrounded by smooth sheets and soft bedding. We use clothing to honor our historic cultures and to identify our social groups. We carefully choose special garments to mark significant milestones of our lives. These textiles carry the residue of memories and experience both individuals and the collective society. The very fabric is infused with social practice, history, and human connection.

We live in a capitalist society that supports abundant acquisitions and thoughtless disposal. So not only do we treasure a significant garment and pass it down through generations we also buy that ugly dress from Old Navy that never fits right, sits in the back of your closet for 5 years and eventually ends up in the garbage. Textile waste is second only to oil in being the largest polluter of the environment. 15 billion tons of textile waste ends up in landfills in the US alone per year. That number is projected to increase to 35 billion tons by 2019. As the textiles decompose in landfills they produce methane gas, a harmful greenhouse gas that is a major contributor to global warming, and unlike so many other materials nearly 100% of textile waste can be recycled.

