



Art's Higher State

THE VISION & PRACTICE OF
DEANNA MUSGRAVE

"A CONVERSATION WITH EMMA KUNZ", ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 47" TONDO, 2019



PORTRAIT BY NIENKE IZURIETA, CROWN

For visual artist Deanna Musgrave, art and healing are interwoven. This is why transformation is the crux of her work and the reason she found home in Saint John, a historic working-class city on the Bay of Fundy. This place possesses energy she describes as having *“an ancient quality that brings together polarity.”*

It is polarities that inhabit Deanna’s vision. Her work is an interaction that seeks unity, exuding energy in the process, much like the current transformative renaissance happening here in the old port city.

“Just looking at the Saint John landscape in the present, you have the polarities of the extreme industrial smashing up against opulent built heritage or grand nature, wealth and poverty, as well as health and illness.”

Everything exists in opposition.

Deanna is a painter whose abstract Mirror-Portraits are created through intuitive, esoteric and self-reflective means. They offer subjects and viewers a new portal into their higher self. The creation of Mirror-Portraits can include energy work, dowsing, codifications, hypnosis, and aligning energy medicine with the body.

“My whole painting career feels like an attempt to remember something I used to know how to do,” says Deanna. *“The process of Mirror-Portraits came from many years of this feeling of knowing and trying to remember how a painting can be a body map for a person; showcase their energy and can be utilized for the purpose of healing.”*

Her visual motifs are akin to Swiss artist, researcher and healer Emma Kunz, who created drawn codes in a similar process. For a large part of her career, Deanna refrained from speaking about the energy and healing aspects of her work and focused on the relationship of her painting to music. She often collaborates with her husband, Andrew Reed Miller, musician and player with Symphony New Brunswick.

"Painting music (or vibration) is very connected to energy medicine, for me, as the visual experience of energy is similar to synesthesia – an intermixing of the senses such as seeing colours to sound," she says. "Energy medicine assumes the theory that all is energetic vibrations and if you understand where the imbalances are and shift them, wellness is better achieved."

Energy and vibration move in a similar fashion to sound/music and as a result their waves map the body. Geometric patterns are formed in materials like sand, water, oil when disturbed by different frequencies, and some create shapes akin to those found in the human body.

It wasn't until Deanna read Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, which proposes that colours and sound relate to form a spiritual state, that ideas deeply resonated and helped to form her current practice. She remains reluctant to use the word "spiritual" as she feels it is not taken seriously in the academic art community.

"Instead I talk about human codification systems which seek to express the 'mysterious' of the human experience and that often leads us into 'higher states' or 'peak experience,'" she says. "It was at the moment of reading Kandinsky's book that I realized I could achieve what I sought to express in art; the mysterious and higher states through the expression of music in visual art."

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CHANNEL: CONVERSATIONS WITH EMMA KUNZ,
AX CENTRE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE, SUSSEX, NB
MARCH 2019 - MAY 5TH 2019



"MIRROR - JENNIFER", ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 47" TONDO, 2019



CLOUD, MIXED MEDIA ON CANVAS, 10' BY 56' 2015



CLOUD AT HANS KLOHN COMMONS



In an era where we are glued to electronic screens, and constantly consuming rapid visual culture online, it's now more important than ever to see art in the physical and go to galleries. Art humbles, and offers opportunity to connect beyond words. It can be a vehicle for a myriad of emotions, including: empathy, grief, chronic illness, and loss.

Deanna's public installations create a conduit for access to such embodied emotions. *Tropos* (2011), an abstract work, looks like an ethereal dreamscape of walking the ocean floor. Part of her Masters of Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of New Brunswick (UNB), it highlights her world-making talents and ability to create in large scale.

This led to *Cloud* (2015), a biomorphic motion toward the multitudes of art, science and history. The immensity of the permanent installation, measuring 10 feet by 56 feet, is felt vividly when viewed at UNB's Hans Klohn Commons. Other permanent installations include *Nest* (2017), a beautiful dynamic migration through the pedway between City Hall and Market Square in Saint John, and *Mirror* (2019), two tondo paintings which speak to the infinite knowledge of books, the imagination and the internet, on display at the Carleton North High School Library.



DETAIL OF MIRROR | NIENKA IZURIETA

Art is rarely separate, or secondary, to life. As evidence, Deanna holds a Master of Interdisciplinary Studies from University of New Brunswick, a Bachelor of Education, and Bachelor of Fine Arts. She is trained and certified in hypnotism, Akashic field therapy, dowsing, cellular

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mind-body alignment, and reiki. Her relationship to healing and art are in fusion.

"Tragedy is part of the human experience, but some of us are given unique form of tragedy, or series of tragedies, to process. We are

presented a choice of remaining victim to our grief or healing from it and using that knowledge to heal others," says Deanna.

"In my life, I grew up with a mentally ill older sister who took her life in 2007. Soon after that I became a stepmother of three children and faced all the challenges associated with raising a blended family with much of that stress coming from others

outside the family unit. I have experienced hatred, harassment, bullying and scapegoating. Through all that I developed a deep and real relationship with my stepson, who tragically died in 2014."

After such profound and recurrent loss, Deanna has started to open up about her combined practice as artist and healer. Currently, she is preparing for her first solo show, to be presented midsummer 2020 at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery. She has invited the public to donate objects for this exhibition for use in her watermarking process, where she lays artifacts in water and pigment to imprint onto canvas.

"I see this as a form of alchemy, that the memory and energy of what is within the object moves with the water onto the painting surface," she says.

The artist seeks objects that are given with the intention to honour someone or some thing. For example, she will use small wood pieces from Saint John's lost Anglin House, and skateboard wheels that once belonged to her stepson.

"Specifically, I want objects that hold energy of what no longer serves you from the past 10 years, that you are ready to release, so that you can walk into the next decade unencumbered by the weight of it." □

"MIBBICH, HENNEY", ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 47" BY 31" OVAL, 2019.



Shannon Webb-Campbell

Mixed Indigenous (Mi'kmaq)
Settler Poet, Writer & Critic
Editor of Visual Arts News