

HELD - Colour stories from the land



Melanie Monique Rose
Curated by Sage Wosminity

On view at Neutral Ground Artist Run
Centre from July 30 – September 18, 2022.



Left: Sage Wosminity, Held #2, 2022.

Right: Sage Wosminity, Held #3, 2022.



“I’ve always been a maker”

Through the practice of naturally dyeing silk scarves, Melanie Monique Rose explores her interests in the practical and medicinal use of plants and, by extension, the natural world around her. Her process of dyeing is intuitive; there are no set recipes nor two pieces that turn out the same. Although her process involves experimentation, it also requires careful consideration and calculation in order to fully capture the details of the plants, whose likenesses are captured within the natural fibers of silk scarves. Rose builds upon what she has learned from others while also allowing the foraged goods to guide her process. She utilizes an abundance of natural materials in her works on silk; leftover onion skins from her kitchen, Goldenrod found in nearby ditches or berries gathered while on holiday.

Rose likens her process working with natural materials to unwrapping a present. As each piece finishes processing and the final result is revealed she is greeted by a welcome surprise. Each plant or flower takes on a life of its own, finding a way to leave its own unique impression within the silk. At every glance the eye is met with a new flower, petal or leaf that has left an indelible mark on the cloth. The colors achieved by the dyeing process are unbelievably vibrant and expressive. When the sun hits the silk fibers they glow and reflect the light, exposing even richer hues. Thus offering us an ethereal glimpse into the secret lives of the plants that occupy the land around us. Rose’s work exposes the beauty and wonder tucked away in local ditches and trails, encouraging us to take a closer look as to what these plants wish to communicate with us.

Kinship

Questions surrounding ancestral knowledge in relation to both the artist and the land around her begin to arise for Rose as she forages for materials. Can the plants that line the highways and ditches become a conduit for ancestral teachings? As Rose gathers she ponders how her ancestors would have used these materials before her. Did they use them for food, medicine or dye? Rose is able to find connection with both her Metis and Ukrainian roots through this process. She takes her time to thoughtfully make the acquaintance of each new plant she encounters in order to further understand the history of the land around her and the unique use associated with each plant.

In conversation with the artist, the childrens' book "Kokums Held Babushka" by Marion Mutala came up frequently. This book was gifted to her after the birth of her daughter Meadow and has always left an impression on her. The book looks at relations between Ukrainian settlers and the Métis, incorporating the perspectives of both settlers arriving on the land and the perspective of the Métis communities. The book highlights stories of shared community values and finding one another's humanity while also acknowledging the harm of settler colonialism on the prairies. Rose's scarves serve as an ode to "Kokums Babushka" while also reimagining the story through her own lens, acknowledging the importance of community knowledge and tradition in both her Métis and Ukrainian heritage.

Intergenerational knowledge is powerful, not only does it preserve family values and traditions, it also directly connects us with generations who came before us. There is a deep intimacy in the passing down of these teachings. Hearing a story that's been passed down through time or seeing a family heirloom crafted by the hands of an ancestor is such an honor. I often find myself astonished when looking at old recipe books or sewing projects my grandmother has shared with me from her relatives. I don't know how many times I've heard the phrase "Oh if your great grandmother were here she could show you how to do this." My grandmother has always been my biggest teacher and has been integral in passing down intergenerational knowledge to me, so this statement has always struck me as modest. Growing up learning from her and my grandfather is something that has shaped me into who I am today and has informed all aspects of my life. The theme of intergenerational sharing is something that initially drew me to Rose's work as the importance of family and community echos throughout her artistic practice.



Sage Wosminity, Held #4, 2022.

Held

We use flowers to comfort, we send them in times of success and accomplishment, and also in the lows of grief and mourning. Flowers can act as a conduit for our love and as a sign of solidarity with those we care for. If I can't be present with you during your time of grieving, if I can't fully convey my feelings to you, if I can't hold you in this moment, these flowers can take that place in the hopes they can provide a brief moment of peace. Rose's scarves, which she describes as wearable art, recalls this notion of being held and comforted. The fabric cradles the wearer, while the imprinted flowers remind us that we are being held by the land. Her work holds the ability inspires a sense of peace and connectedness.

While showing me different pieces, Rose recalls dreamy memories of foraging or deadheading plants in her backyard with her daughter. She can instantly recall a location, time, or season when looking at a certain work and is transported back to that memory. The imprint of the flowers left on the silk physically represent the preservation of those precious memories. When I look at Rose's work I am reminded of the flowers that line my backyard, I see the cherry tree planted along the fence and I'm transported back to memories of making jam with my father. When the imprint of a petal or flower meets my eye I am reminded of the pansies my grandma collected in order to decorate a childhood birthday cake. These precious memories shared with loved ones have been fostered by our relationship with the land around us. Rose's work invites us to listen to the stories whispered to us by the land, acknowledge those who came before us while also using what we've gathered to grow ourselves in order to best care for those around us.

- Sage Wosminity



Left: *Sage Wosminity, Held #5, 2022.*

Right: *Sage Wosminity, Held #6, 2022.*



Melanie Monique Rose is a visual artist from Regina, Saskatchewan Treaty 4 Territory, and a long-time contributing member of Sâkêwêwak Artists' Collective Inc. She attended Kootenay School of the Arts with a major in the Fibre Arts in Nelson, B.C. Melanie has exhibited her artwork in both group and solo exhibitions. One of her greatest honors was to receive the distinction of Excellence in Textiles in the Saskatchewan Craft Council's Dimension's 2013 touring show. In 2020, CBC celebrated Melanie as a Future 40 for her work in arts and culture. Most recently she was a recipient of the Saskatchewan Foundation of the Arts Endowment Award. In addition to showing her work, Melanie has worked in the province as gallery facilitator, story-keeper, and art instructor for the Mackenzie Art Gallery and teaches various workshops at both public and private institutions. In 2018 her daughter Meadow Rose was born. Melanie is currently a full-time mom, caregiver, and artist. Becoming a mother has increased her desire to share the stories of her culture and family and has challenged the way she creates independently and as a shared experience with her daughter.

Sage Wosminity is an emerging curator from Regina, Saskatchewan located on Treaty 4 Territory. Sage has a history in fashion design exhibiting numerous collections in both Saskatchewan and Alberta. Sage is currently pursuing an honors degree in Art History and is an avid supporter of the arts in Regina.



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Sage Wosminity, Held #7, 2022.