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STORIES & INSIGHTS

Conversations with Holly Wong

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Today we'd like to introduce you to Holly Wong

Hi Holly, thanks for joining us today. We'd love for you to start by introducing yourself.

I grew up in Miami, Florida. I came to San Francisco in 1989 to attend college. Like many artists, I was creative as a child and loved to paint or draw growing up. As I became a young adult, I found that artwork was a way for me to understand my personal history and to process the more troubling aspects of my life. What began initially as a discipline to improve myself and my craft has become a daily obsession. The practice of making work is the key to keeping me whole, healthy, and optimistic about my life. It resolves feelings of anxiety and helps me to feel purposeful and realized as a person.

Alright, so let's dig a little deeper into the story – has it been an easy path overall and if not, what were the challenges you've had to overcome?

It hasn't exactly been a smooth road but I do feel very satisfied at this point in my life. I spent 25 years balancing a full time day job with a studio practice. I will be retiring in 1 month to become a full time artist. My process to date has been to get up at 2am daily and do my best work while the house is quiet and still. I try to get in to the studio daily no matter what, which is a delicate balance when considering all the other demands on our time with family commitments. It has also felt very physically exhausting to keep up this schedule over the years. My studio is in my home in a spare bedroom, but both my husband and I use the entire house to make work. I am often challenged for space to store my work and supplies….but we own very little furniture, instead prioritizing open space to make our work. We have lived in this house for the past 20+ years so we feel very comfortable here.

As you know, we're big fans of you and your work. For our readers who might not be as familiar what can you tell them about what you do?

Over the past 20 years since finishing my MFA program, my work has migrated back and forth from painting and drawing to larger scale fiber-based installations. In graduate school, I also did single channel video and performance. Much of my earlier work spoke to social or political issues in a more didactic fashion as I tried to tell a story about the history of violence against women and the use of rape as a tool of war and genocide. My work was externally focused but as I changed as an artist over time, I realized that I had to invert this to instead tell my own stories in a way that was more universal to the experiences of viewers. I started to think more broadly about feminism and what it meant to me in the sense that the body becomes a battle ground in contemporary culture. I use the act of making quilt-like constructions that I then cut up and rebuild to describe the female body and the ways in which it is defined as impure, imperfect and never enough. My artmaking becomes a form of reclaiming and honoring the body and my integration of materials over the past 5 years in particular is a part of that process. If I am known for anything, it is probably my large suspended fiber installations. I am most proud of my recent selection as a California Arts Council Fellow in the Established Artist category. I feel really seen in receiving this award.

Where do you see things going in the next 5-10 years?

I think individual artists will continue to professionalize and become better advocates for themselves in terms of receiving a fair share of their sales, stipends and better compensation for exhibitions. With the blossoming of online artist communities, artists are increasingly able to share information and ensure

greater parity and fairness in what they are negotiating with venues. I also think there will be an increase in artist to collector direct sales as well as further collaborations between artists, galleries, art consultants and designers. Basically more transparency in a world that was previously very opaque where no one knew sales prices or compensation across institutions.

Contact Info:

- **Website:** https://hollywongart.com/
- **Instagram:** https://www.instagram.com/hollywongart/
- **Facebook:** https://www.facebook.com/Hollywongart
- **Youtube:** https://www.youtube.com/@hollywong4649

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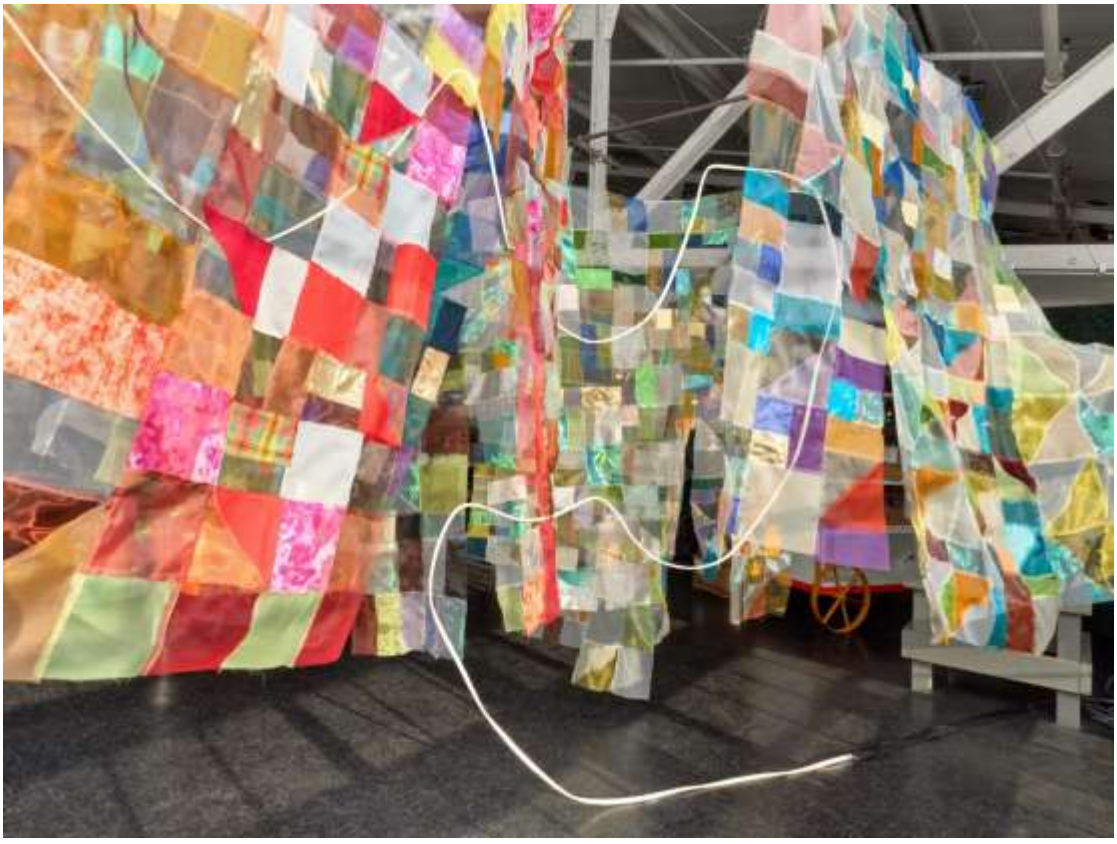

709 Walnut Street 1st Floor Philadelphia PA 19106 tel 215 413 8893 fax 215 413 2283
email bmayer@bridgettemayergallery.com www.bridgettemayergallery.com

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