



## ARTIST INTERVIEW // JULIE MAREN

POSTED BY EDEN IN ARTIST INTERVIEWS / PAINTING TAGGED WITH ANIMALS / BOOK ILLUSTRATION / PATTERN ON APR 30 2014

Julie Maren's multi-layered paintings tell mythical stories woven around the core concept of the human journey. While the stories may differ, they often have parallel narratives focusing on the natural world, different aspects of the human experience, and emotional states of being. Her work sometimes pictures humans, other times animals, and even on occasion beings that are a combination of the two. Julie's technique involves a mixture of painting, gel-transfers, collage, drawing and lots of experimentation. You'll notice that the colorful, dreamy backgrounds she creates also incorporate repeating patterns — derived from her work as a textile designer. I am very excited to share Julie's interview. Don't miss her inspired advice based on her own insights and experience as an artist. Thank you Julie! *-eden*



Julie Maren and her studio

**Where are you based?**

Boulder, Colorado

**What three words would you choose to best describe your artwork?**

narrative, evocative, playful



Bride of the Fox, 18x29 in

**Has your childhood had a significant effect on your work? If so, paint us a picture of what your childhood was like in words? (If you have an image you would like to share, please do.)**

I believe my art practice definitely started as a child! I was making stuff from the time I could hold a crayon. I even had a little attitude – in preschool, when the teacher would dare to put a piece of tape with my name on it on the front of my painting, I would quickly paint over it because even at that age, I think that I had an aesthetic sense of what I liked – and it did not include my name on masking tape on my painting.

Nature was very important to me as a child. My family camped all summer long with our pop up trailer. Once my parents took us on a 10,000-mile camping trip, spanning Mexico to Canada. I was always doing crafts on the trips – often with things that I found in the woods. I was quite fond of gluing moss, plastic animals and googly eyes to driftwood. I was always making stuff at home as well. I remember my mom would tell me to just make a card, instead of buying one – so I still do that if I have time. I also created many “fashion magazines” of clothes that I designed – almost all of which featured the same very large, voluminous skirt.



### **Have you had a formal art education?**

Yes. I received my BFA from CU Boulder. I also learned how to carve stone through the Arts Student League of Denver and MARBLE/marble's annual stone carving symposium.



Seduction, 23×23 in

### **Was there a specific moment when you knew you wanted to be an artist?**

I always knew it because I was always making things – but I didn't necessarily think that I could make a living as an artist- so in college, I studied anthropology, philosophy and literature before realizing that all of the above were equally difficult career choices, so then I decided that I may as well study and do what I love.

### **What was the first piece of art that you sold? How did the sale come about?**

The first piece that I sold was a painting called "flirt." I showed it during a slide show, my first year attending the MARBLE/marble symposium. I remember feeling shy because I was showing painting and not stone carving, as I was new to stone at the time – but the painting caught the eye of another sculptor and I was thrilled and shocked to sell it!

### **Tell us about what inspires your work.**

The materials and experimentation really drive my work. I love to playing with and combining different materials and techniques to see where the experience takes me. I am also inspired by pattern and color combinations. The idea of "creating space" through layering and depth has been important to me in the last several years. Also, I am definitely obsessed with the idea of working on

multiple pieces which work together as a larger whole, but also each can exist on its own. I almost always work on multiple paintings simultaneously (one of my last series was a grid of 40 12 x 12" paintings) Working on multiple paintings for me is a function of storytelling – almost like I am creating a visual book – where characters, pattern, ideas recur, providing a narrative.



Eternal and Transitory, 46x23 in

My technique is influenced in part by my work as a textile designer. I design on a graph, so each square equals a knit stitch. As I constantly zoom in and out of the patterns, microcosms and macrocosms reveal and patterns become their own worlds. This informs the way I paint in that I often continue working in a graph-like manner, with multiple square panels composing larger whole. Likewise, I am attracted to certain color combinations; drawn to specific patterns because of how they relate to my painting; and I am continuously playing with different perspectives.

As I build layers in my paintings, the “graph” gains dimension as the paintings gain depth, and this is where my interest lies. I think of the graph/grid as the fiber behind what connects us all as humans. It becomes as multi-dimensional as we are, with our layers of stories woven from personal experiences and our emotional make-ups. Patterns and imagery emerge from below the surface, they dissolve into the shadows, they transform from flat to dimensional, they obscure and reveal, go from darkness to light.

Nature inspires me tremendously – truth really is stranger than fiction and nature proves that point to me continually – like when I really study a seed pod or watch a spider spin a web...

I like to tell stories about the human journey and different emotional states of being – and I tend to use imagery informed by nature, science, antiquities, mythology and world religions to tell those stories.





Grand Mal, 48×36 in

**When you feel a lack of inspiration, how do you find it again?**

Ultimately, I continue working, knowing that it will return – I do this by playing around with my materials until I find a jumping off point or something that captivates my interest. For the short term, I take my dog for a walk on a trail. Inspiration comes when I least expect it sometimes – an image will just pop in my head. I also keep journals which are full of imagery that I can reference during long periods of drought.

**Approximately how many pieces of art do you typically create in a year?**

as many as possible

**How do you make money through your art? Please explain what works for you and why. (For example: selling originals or prints online or in galleries, doing commissions, working with major brands, etc.)**

I sell my original paintings through galleries, my studio, art shows (like the Cherry Creek Arts Festival) and my website. I also work on commission as a painter. I am also a sculptor and I sell my sculptures and do architectural stone carving (bas-relief). I licensed my work to publishers for use on book covers, illustrations (one painting work will be featured in the May/June issue of

Spirituality and Health Magazine, for example); I illustrate children's books; I write grants for projects that I want to accomplish that need funding; I designed a limited edition artist series of socks for Smartwool.

**Do you “make a living” as an artist? If not, how do you primarily support yourself?**

I used to make my entire living through my artwork — and I guess I still am, just in different ways. Let me explain: the economic decline (resulting in all my galleries closing) coincided with my need to let my work evolve without worrying about selling it. So, for about 5 years, I allowed myself to just play and experiment without any pressure to show my work, and now I see what a gift this was. I became a textile designer to pay my bills — but I actually love designing textiles and see how important pattern and color have always been in my work, but now I am pushing that further.



Red Hot, 23×23 in

**What have you found to be the most successful way(s) to market your art? Do you have any tips to share?**

This is definitely one place that I feel like I need to work on, to catch up with the times! Social media definitely took over during the time that I took off from showing my work — so my old fashioned marketing techniques (postcards) needs some updating. Right now I have a Tumblr based website, a Facebook artist site, and I upload images to Artstack. I know that I need to start blogging, tweeting, SEOing and all that — and it is happening slowly.

**How would you describe the “business” of being an artist?**

It is a dance in which you get to wear multiple hats. First, you get to be the creative — my favorite part. You also are the documentarian, who photographs

the work; the marketer who gets it out there; the schlepper and installer – who drops off and picks up and instals work; the networker who connects with other artists and gallery owners to open up new opportunities; the fundraiser who writes grants.



Aphrodite, 18×48 in

**What is your favorite thing about being an artist?**

Working for myself, doing something that I believe in – and that the result of my play and experimentation (and my cumulative years of experience and skill) can really touch someone deeply.

**Who have been your biggest supporters?**

My parents; my partner Raimund; and Smartwool has been good to me.

**If you could collaborate with anyone (a person or a company) who would it be?**

My biggest collaboration fantasy is working with Prada to design textile prints. My next biggest fantasy would be a collaboration with Todd Reed, the jewelry designer. I absolutely love his work and think it would be fun to see where we could go with it. I love collaborating in general and am currently working with two other artists (Jessica Moon Bernstein and Angela Beloian) on different painting projects.

**Do you have any current obsessions, art or non-art related?**

Many. Yoga, mushroom hunting, hot springs, making pottery (I am taking a class), stone carving, Assyrian bas-relief carving, growing succulents, landscaping, my dog Fidel – to name a few.





Bringer of the Sun, 23×23 in

**What piece of advice would you give other women who are pursuing careers in art?**

Have a practice and work on your skill – as much as possible. You don't build skills unless you exercise that creative muscle. Experiment and play!! This is how it happens – Julia Cameron states it perfectly: "...creativity lies in paradox. Serious art is born from serious play." See as much art as possible. You are not your work – have a life outside of art making and know that if your art gets rejected, it isn't you that is getting rejected. Get your name out there – show often and wherever when you are getting started – you can be more discerning later, about where you want to show. Always do the best job possible, have integrity – to yourself and others. Learn to listen to that voice inside – there are a number of possible solutions for a work of art, but only one solution looks inevitable... you just have to listen to the voice within.

**Do you have any upcoming shows, news, or things you'd like to let us know about?**

I wrote and illustrated a book called *The Elixir is Love* which I will self publish in the Fall – more info will soon be available on my website.