



MELISSA
MAHONEY

Abstract Painter

Mahoney

MELISSA MAHONEY

ABSTRACT PAINTER



ABOUT THE ARTIST

LEGACY FOR THE LOVE OF ART

When I was seven years old, I remember cutting off a section of the front of my hair so that I could make a paintbrush from it. The concept was good, but because I used cello tape to affix it to the back end of a pencil, it fell apart as soon as I dipped it in water. But so began my commitment to art.

I always remember being an artist. I grew up in a family of artists, drawing and painting from the day that I could hold a crayon and paintbrush.

My Mom is an artist. She works primarily in pen and ink. My Mom's parents were also artists, working in pencil, watercolor, and woodblock. My Mom and grandparents all studied at the Art Institute of Chicago.

I remember sitting next to my Mom and sketching at a young age. It was a great way to bond with her, and a way for her to keep a small child entertained. I loved it!

Some of my most prized possessions are the artwork created by my family.



1935, by Melissa's maternal grandfather



1935, by Melissa's maternal grandfather



1935, by Melissa's maternal grandmother



1973, by Melissa's mother

FORMAL TRAINING AND THE EARLY YEARS AFTER COLLEGE

I went on to formal art training, earning a BFA from the University of Georgia, majoring in graphic design and minoring in fine art. I also studied art in Tuscany, Italy, in their graduate program. I studied hand-lettering and calligraphy. Some of the brushwork skills that I learned then have worked their way into my abstract painting.

For many years, I drew and painted representational art where the subject was recognizable. Sometimes stylized but many times photorealistic work. I created most of this artwork for myself as a creative outlet. I liked to keep my eyes and hands trained. I could tell when I was in a good stride and the artwork seemed to create itself.



1987, pencil sketch, by Melissa Mahoney



2002, acrylic painting on canvas, by Melissa Mahoney

TRANSITIONING TO ABSTRACTION

As time went on, I worked larger and looser. I loved the energy of these larger, more abstract paintings. They seemed to come to life in a different way.

I experimented with a triptych entitled Girasol, Spanish for sunflower, pushing the abstraction of the subject.

Then I remember making a painting of an overhead view of a koi pond. After I painted the koi, I applied swirls of blue color on top of the fish, obscuring most of the subject matter. I titled this painting Hidden Koi.

I continued working in this way for another year, creating paintings of a certain subject and then obscuring it with abstract circular or linear shapes. I found myself moving further and further from the subject and working with only color, shape, form and texture. This is when the Vortices series was born, my art transitioning to abstract painting completely.



Girasol, triptych, 16"x 20" each, acrylic on canvas, 2003

I see my art as turbulent and alive.

— MELISSA MAHONEY



Hidden Koi, 60" x 48", acrylic on canvas, 2003

VORTICES

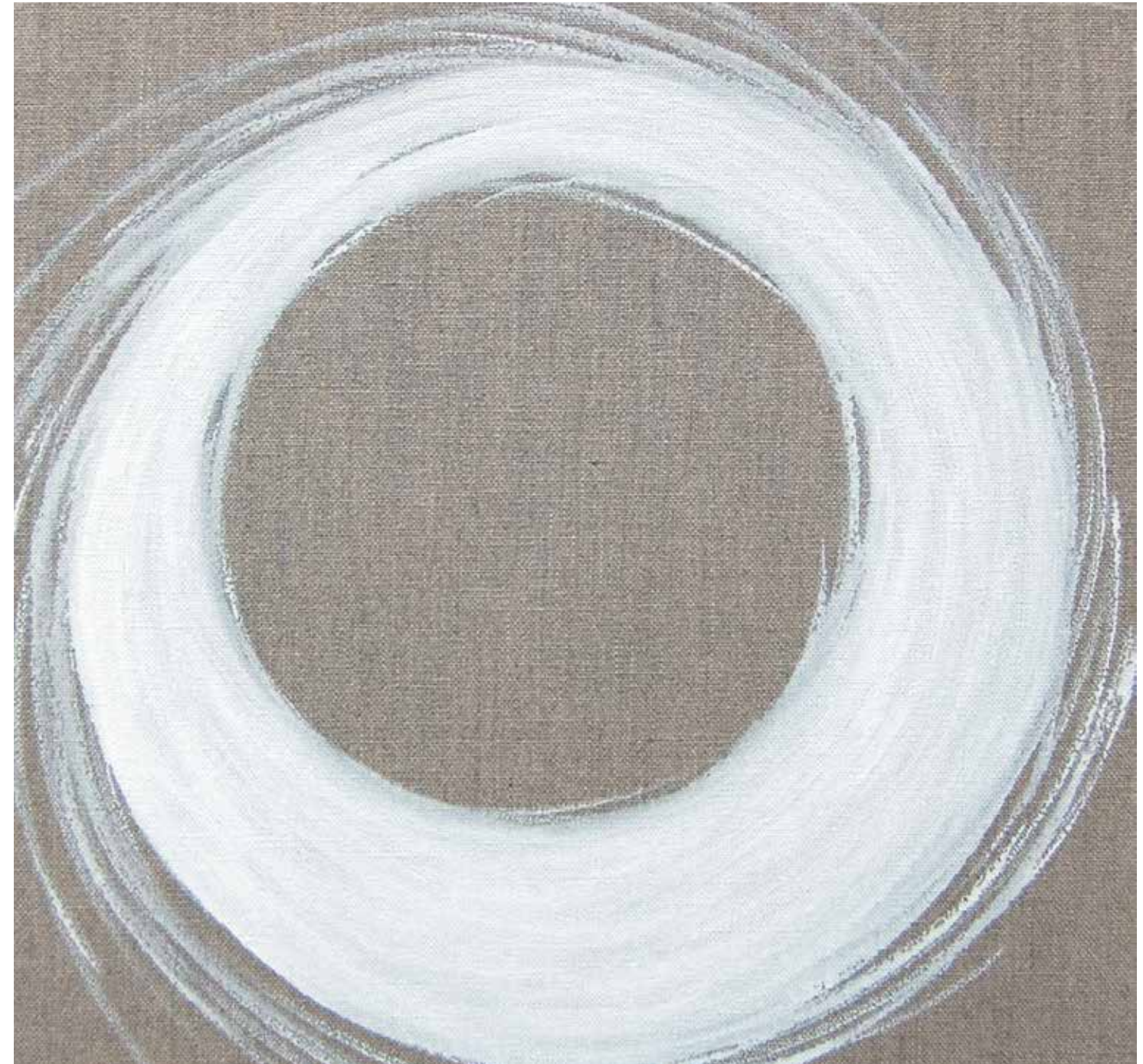
This series is called Vortices. I've been working on this for over 15 years. It's an abstract series of circular paintings, created with a range of materials.

Vortices draw all that surround them into their powerful currents. I'm interested in these masses of energy and how they can contain and then transfer their energy. Each piece is intended to convey a sense of motion and an energy that captures, and then transcends, the particular subject matter.

Translating these energies in raw form, I feed the canvas with paint, dyes, metal leaf, enamel, and modeling paste, utilizing color with shades of dark and light.

In turn, the completed work expresses this dynamic force, inviting the viewer to receive the energy if they so choose.

Mahoney



BREATH

12" x 12" acrylic on raw linen

SELECTED ARTWORK

ART IN EMBASSIES

Established in 1963, the U.S. Department of State's office of Art in Embassies (AIE) plays a vital role in our nation's public diplomacy through a culturally expansive mission, creating temporary and permanent exhibitions, artist programming, and publications.

ART IN EMBASSIES **U.S. Department of State**

Welcome excerpt from Ambassador Erin E. McKee

It is this shared oceanic "bridge" that connects our nations, in which we find our true selves, and I chose the theme of "The Ocean" for the selected American artwork. Considering the Western Edge of the Continental U.S., the Waves series, or Pacific Rising, one clearly feels the impression the ocean has left on the artist, and in turn, upon us. From vibrant colors and cresting waves, to calming seascapes and waterfront serenity, each piece in its own way captures the strength—and calm—of the sea.

In society, women's empowerment is one of the most critical elements for fulfilling the promise of every country's potential, and a key focus of my Embassy team's work, so I selected pieces from female artists. Their artwork and expressions of creativity reinforce women's strength, vision, and potential.

I hope all of you enjoy sharing and cherishing this "mighty ocean" exhibit as much as I have.

PACIFIC RISING

36" x 36" acrylic, enamel, foil leaf on wood panel



MELISSA MAHONEY / ARTIST STATEMENT

Paintings like Pacific Rising, from her Vortices series, arose from her deep interest in vortices and the powerful currents that surround them. These paintings are intended to convey a sense of motion. Mahoney fills the canvas with paint, dyes, metal leaf, enamel, and modeling paste, utilizing color with shades of dark and light. The completed work expresses a dynamic force.

SUMMER SURF SERIES

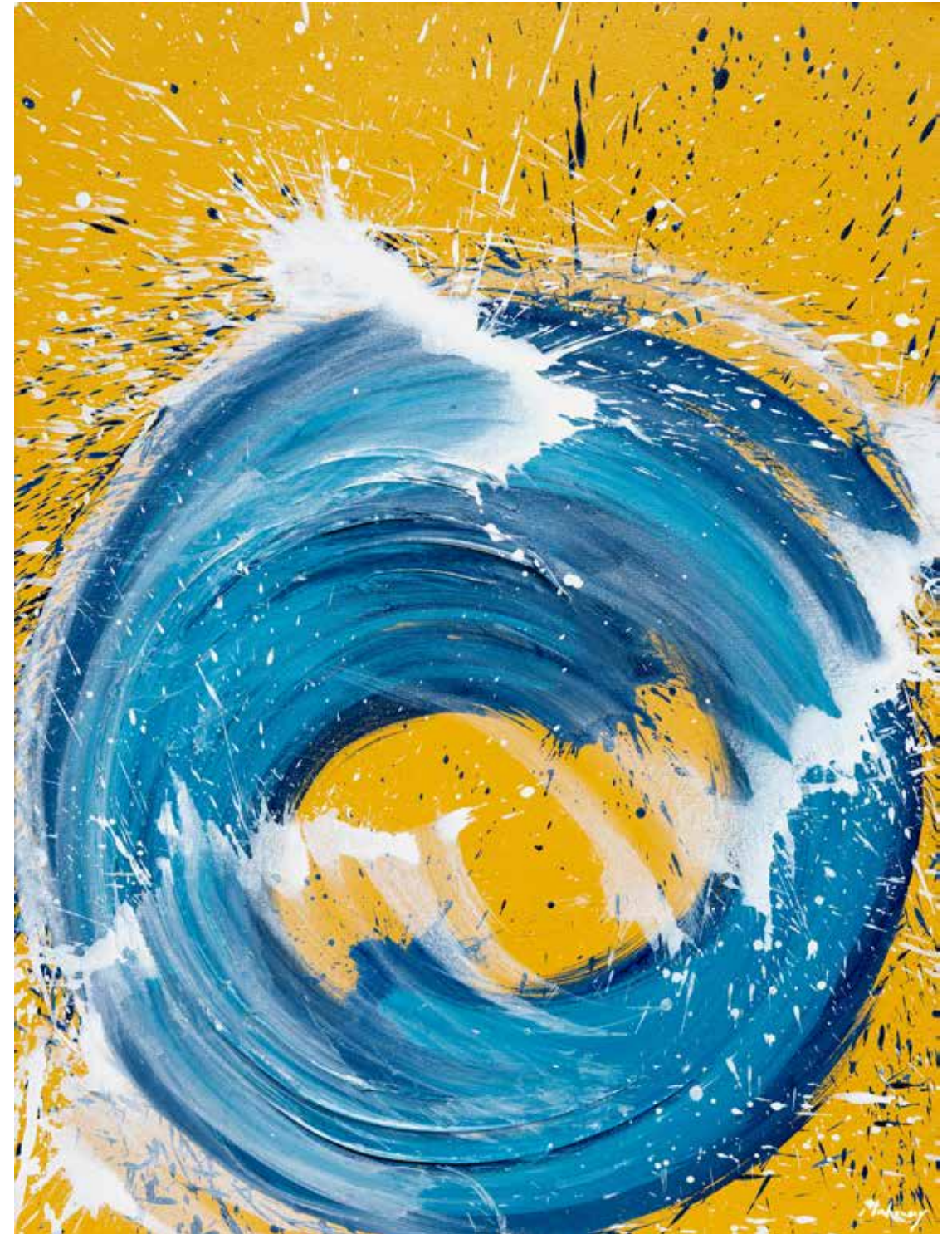
I love the summertime when the days are long.
During this time of year, I'm especially drawn to the ocean as inspiration.

Lately, I've been working on a series that I titled Summer Surf.
It's inspired by the ocean swells, surf, and currents.



SUMMER SURF /B /C
30" x 40" acrylic on canvas

I'm working with a color palette that goes beyond the subjective blues of the ocean, bringing a range of warm and cool colors into the paintings as well as neutrals.



SUMMER SURF /A
30" x 40" acrylic on canvas

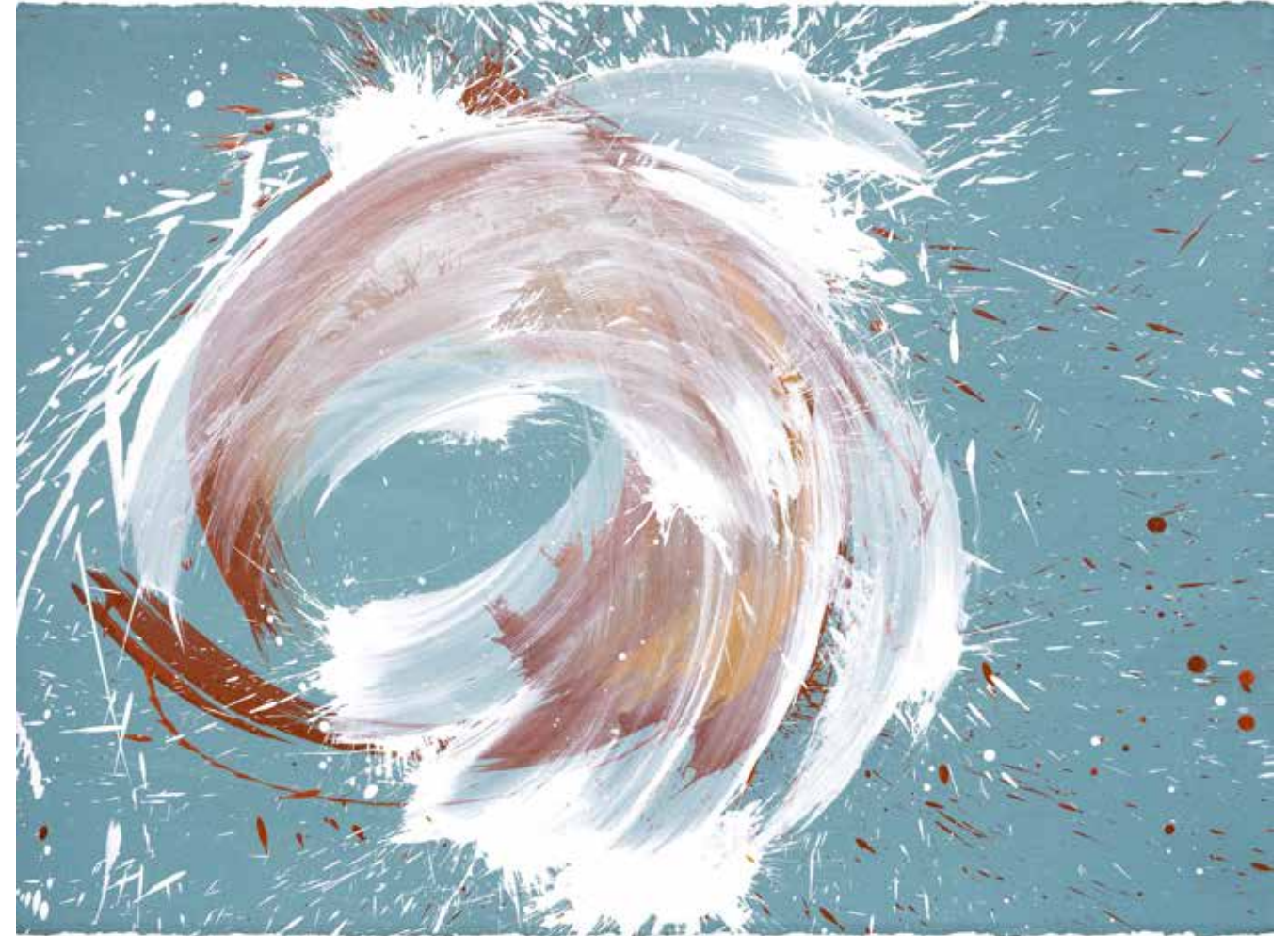


PACIFIC BREAKERS
60" x 36" acrylic on canvas

Creating large circles with complex layers of brushstrokes brings the energy of the force of the ocean into these paintings.

INTRODUCING—WORKS ON PAPER

30"x22.5" acrylic
300lb/638gsm watercolor paper
two deckled edges



PAIN TING ON GLASS

INSPIRATION

I remember once seeing a video of Jackson Pollock painting on glass filmed from below. It left a lasting impression on me. One day when I was visiting the photography studio of my friend Robert Houser, I saw a 4'x6'x4' box that he had built with a glass top. Robert had photographed San Francisco ballet dancers performing on the glass top, while he filmed from below.

Those images were stunning. This led me to want to paint on the glass while Robert filmed and recorded my creation.



Bay Area photographer and friend Robert Houser captured these amazing images

“As a painter, this point of view from underneath the surface is so unique. The view that I’m familiar with is from above.”

— MELISSA MAHONEY

PAINTING ON GLASS



"It's definitely a collaboration and conversation between artist and photographer. Both Melissa and I talked through the filming process, and it was great to help capture and influence where the brushstrokes might go next."

— ROBERT HOUSER, PHOTOGRAPHER AND VIDEOGRAPHER



I wanted to explore the idea of painting on materials that were both transparent and semi-transparent. So I painted on the clear glass and also a diffused surface.

Robert and I were able to set up a semi-transparent, glass surface that showed the paint on the surface and myself where I am somewhat obscured. The shadows become the star in this series, along with the brushstrokes. It takes a while to see what is happening and even to understand how the series is captured. I like how it allows the viewer to discover the process as they look further.





ARTWORK AT SEA



THE DANCE OF WIND AND WATER/
LA DANZA DEL VENTO E DELL'ACQUA
22" diameter, acrylic on birch marine ply / in the forward cabin



I met the owner of this yacht while attending the TED2020 conference. We connected through our shared appreciation of visual arts. It led to a friendship and also to a commission of a custom painting to hang in the forward cabin of their yacht. It was a great collaboration that resulted in a painting that pushed my use of new materials and color schemes. Says the client, "It fits the new space perfectly and embodies the painting's namesake, The Dance of Wind and Water."



The 44'-long yacht has a modern classic design and build. Its engine is battery powered, one of the only alternative energy battery-powered yachts at sea.

HOPE SERIES

This series titled Hope is inspired by the sense of renewal and the belief that what lies ahead will turn out for the best.



RISING

60" x 36" acrylic on canvas

When I visualize hope, it's translucent, almost like air.



LIFT

36" x 36" acrylic on canvas

In this series, I painted in shades of white to imbue this feeling of lightness and optimism.

*"I believe, I trust.
I breathe in the levity.
And I move forward."*

— HAIKU BY MELISSA MAHONEY, 2021



TRANSLUCENCY

60" x 36" acrylic on canvas



HOPE SERIES

36" x 36" acrylic on canvas

*With hope, there is a complexity, in a way that is
organic and creates curiosity.*

MY TOOLS

My Vortices series incorporated some of my calligraphic training from Italy. And I later took a class in Chinese calligraphy. In this class, I learned how to make my own ink from a dense piece of charcoal, adding water to it and grinding it in a slate bowl. The process of creating ink was meditative and helped me practice my circle shapes.

I had already discovered painting with large Chinese calligraphy brushes, but this class expanded my affection for working with these tools.



ENSO INSPIRED

Enso is a Japanese word meaning “circle.” It symbolizes absolute enlightenment, strength, the universe, and the void. As an “expression of the moment,” it is often considered a form of minimalist expressionist art. While traditionally painted on silk or rice paper in one movement, I paint on raw linen, canvas, and wood panels using multiple brushstrokes.

I try to capture the circular energy by striking the canvas boldly with a brush loaded with paint. I see this as controlled chaos—there’s both a planned and unexpected outcome.

— Melissa Mahoney



COALESCING

24" x 24" acrylic on canvas



“The energy of the strokes is contagious, and the balance of a completed circle and a half-circle add dynamic tension to the overall composition.”

— MELISSA MAHONEY

AWAKENING

18' x 10' acrylic on canvas

CREATING A 10-FOOT BY 18-FOOT PAINTING USING A 48" BRUSH

The painting is titled Awakening. It is painted with acrylic paints on canvas and is 10-feet by 18-feet. It captures how Melissa personally felt at the moment. As some of the quarantine and shelter restrictions are lifting, she has a renewed appreciation for the freedom that comes with moving around more easily and interacting more closely with people. Awakening speaks to renewal, revival, and awareness. It feels like this painting expresses these concepts.



“I’ve been creating larger paintings in recent years,” Melissa Mahoney says, “and I just created my largest painting to date, 10-feet by 18-feet. It covered almost my full studio floor, with only about 5” left around the edges. It confirmed what I thought would be the case—I really love painting large scale.”

First, Melissa painted the background with neutral colors, including various subtle textures and layers. This created depth and contrast as a base. For the foreground she made large black strokes, using a large brush that she commissioned a brush maker to create—it is 48" tall. She loaded the brush with carbon black paint and began striking the canvas in bold, circular shapes. She knew the composition that she wanted, and the painting really came alive on the canvas.

Melissa loved the process of creating this painting. When she had painted smaller, she used comparatively small hand and arm movements. To paint at this larger scale, she used her whole body.

The canvas was so large that she had to walk on it to make these brushstrokes. She was really “in” the painting. Says Melissa, “The experience of creating in this way is immersive.”

THE RIGHT TOOLS

She has another blank canvas—the same size—and it’s ready to go. Using this same large brush, she’ll paint that the next canvas in the coming weeks, using different colors and with a new composition.

To work in this larger size, Melissa needed the right brush. Previously, she purchased handmade brushes from a master brush maker, so Melissa reached out to her to create a custom brush.

Melissa had this basic arrangement in mind before she started painting, but how it comes together is not always totally predictable. That is the part that she likes as well—the unplanned, yet deliberate, strokes and composition.

RECENT PRESS & EDITORIALS

PUNCH MAGAZINE, JULY 2023

Circular Art / Rounded Zeal: Melissa Mahoney Artwork featured editorial.
 Written by: Sheryl Nonnenberg
 Photography courtesy of: Nadine Priestley, Margot Heron, Melissa Mahoney



MODERN LUXURY SILICON VALLEY

Melissa Mahoney featured editorial: Centerfold
 Photographer: Robert Houser
 September 2021

MODERN LUXURY Silicon Valley



Photographed by Robert Houser

TITAN

48" x 48" acrylic, enamel, foil leaf on wood panel



"When the steel for the Golden Gate Bridge was fabricated by Bethlehem Steel at its foundries in PA and NJ, the steel was coated with a red lead primer. As the bridge towers began to rise for the Golden Gate Bridge, consulting architect Irving F. Morrow was commuting to the construction site from his home in the East Bay via ferry.

"He became inspired by the red lead color. Morrow undertook color studies, which resulted in the specification of the unique Golden Gate Bridge International Orange because it blended well with the nearby hills and contrasted with the ocean and sky." (Excerpt from goldengatebridge.org)

"I'm inspired by this distinct orange color and the majestic scale and design of the Golden Gate Bridge. This series of paintings is my abstract representation of the monumental force that the Golden Gate Bridge exudes."

— Melissa Mahoney

PAINT + PLATE

16" x 16" acrylic, enamel and foil leaf on raw linen



Paint + Plate is a collaborative project I worked on with food blogger Lynn Gray in which food and art combine, reflect, and inspire. A chance meeting at an art gallery produced the idea for the art-meets-cuisine project. We first defined the project's themes of celebration, luck, and new beginnings. From there, colors and textures were explored, and then we went our separate ways to create.

I prepared canvas in my studio as Lynn prepped ingredients in her kitchen. Oysters, always traditional for a New Year's fete, became the subject in Lynn's kitchen and in front of her camera.

I received Lynn's initial test shots and recipe, and the reflection from plate to paint began to emerge. I responded with a series of fifteen paintings. We revealed our works—the resulting project of paintings, photographs, and recipe mirrors the conceptual elements of the visual and culinary arts, a play on color to cuisine, texture to taste, and paint to plate.

SELECTED WORKS:
A SINGLE GRAIN OF RICE

Triptych, 6" x 6" each, acrylic on wood panel



“Expressing total respect for a single grain of rice is to express a total respect for the Buddha. Then we can understand that within this single grain of rice lies the absolute.”

— Eihei Dogen (1200-1253)

Master of Soto school of Zen Buddhism

Each grain of rice, the Japanese say, houses 88 deities. This popular saying refers to the 88 steps that are necessary for the development of rice before being consumed. The symbolic number emphasizes that a mere grain, whose production has cost so much trouble and effort, is infinitely precious.

This quote by Louis Pasteur appears to be an appropriate conclusion: “The role of the infinitely small in nature is infinitely great.”

JURIED SHOW:

The exhibition ONE GRAIN OF RICE stands as an invitation to rediscover the universe through a selection of works of art of small size.

GALERIE MÉTANOÏA, Paris, France.

INVICTUS

48" x 48" acrylic on raw linen



INVICTUS

By William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments
the scroll.

I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

My painting titled Invictus is inspired by one of my favorite poems. It was purchased by a Montecito resident who was visually drawn to the painting. He also had memorized this poem as a child, so the literary connection was serendipitous.

MOZILLA SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON FIREFOX-INSPIRED ARTWORK OF MELISSA MAHONEY

What does the Fox say? Fine artist Melissa Mahoney is thrilled to announce that Mozilla Corporation, maker of the Firefox web browser, has recently acquired one of her paintings. The 24" x 24" acrylic painting is reminiscent of their iconic logo.

Mozilla shared the work with its 21 million followers on Twitter and Facebook. The social media post, which was translated into eight different languages, read "Firefox energy feeding the canvas and creating art with paint and dyes by artist Melissa Mahoney."

A digital strategist at Mozilla first saw the painting on an internal news feed and was drawn to its energy and vitality, as well as its resemblance to Mozilla's Firefox logo. This led to Mozilla incorporating the piece onto their social media channels.

In addition, Mozilla's project manager in charge of designing the space for their headquarters also saw this painting on the internal news feed. This led to the purchase of Melissa's artwork for their Mountain View, California, headquarters.

"This is part of a series that is Enso-inspired. Enso is a Japanese word that means circle. It symbolizes absolute enlightenment and strength. I originally created this painting by exploring the use of complementary colors, such as orange/blue and green/red. I think the tension of colors is what makes this painting really bold and energetic," says Melissa.

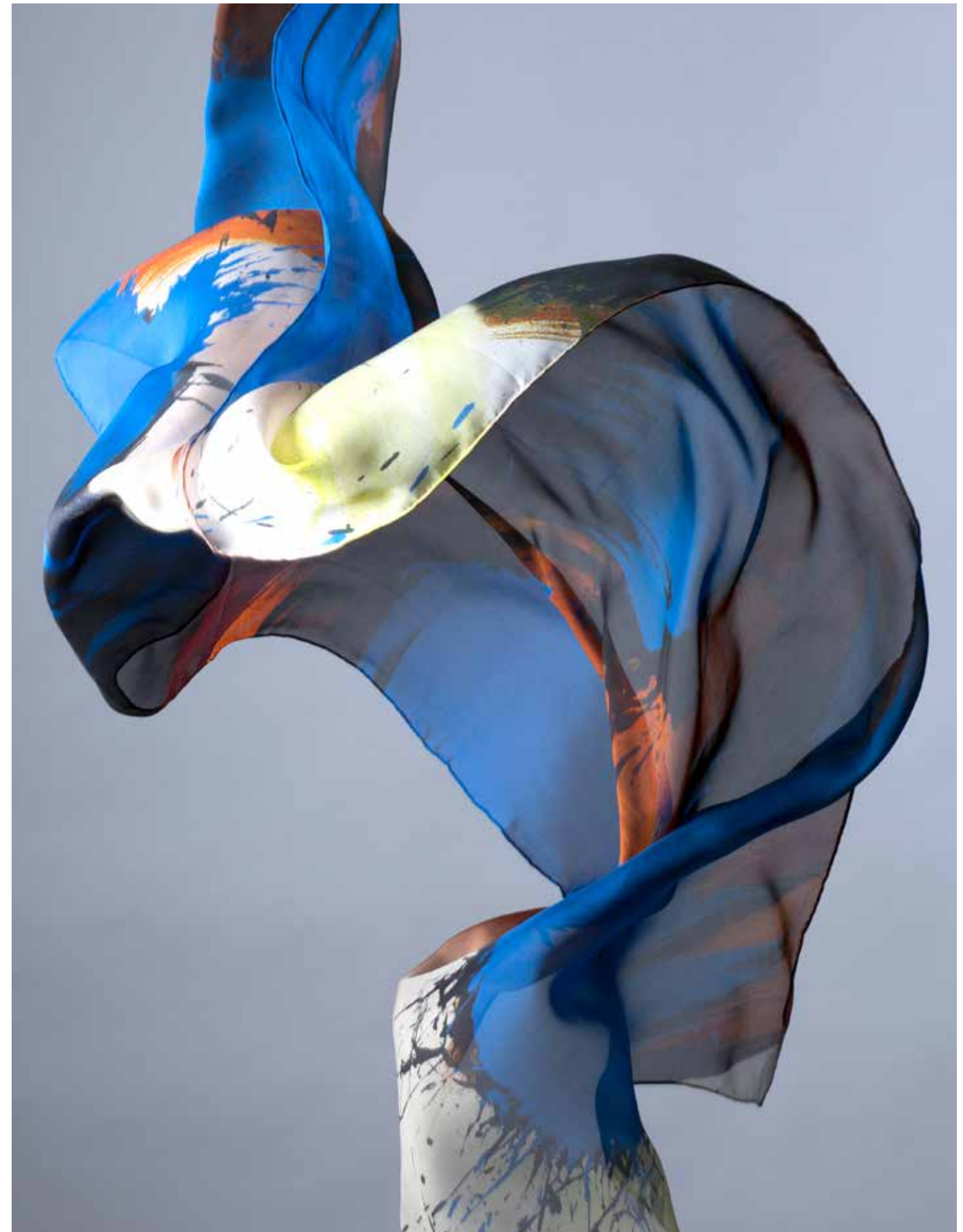


VULPES PAINTING 24" X 24"

Acrylic on raw linen

Vulpes is the Latin word for foxes.
Acquired by Mozilla Corporation.

Featured online and exhibited
in headquarters in
Mountain View, California.



TEXTILES

I found myself wanting to create prints or a way to reproduce my paintings. Limited edition printing was an option, but I think that printed artwork, once it is matted and framed, becomes less alive and more contained.

I began hand-painting silk scarves and loved the way the Vortices translated to fabric.

Soon after, I wanted to find a way to reproduce one painting and make it resemble the actual paintings, rather than hand-paint the textiles.

I started what became a six-year process of sourcing a manufacturer that could reproduce my artwork, maintaining the color accuracy, quality, and color fastness. I found a few amazing manufacturers that I have been working with ever since.

The process of printing is called "wet-dye." It's similar to silk-screening except silk-screening uses opaque pigments whereas wet-dyes use transparent pigments. This allows the colors and printing to show at 100% richness on both sides of the textiles.

I also work with universities, organizations, and companies to create textiles with my artwork and colors reflecting their corresponding brands. It's a fun way to collaborate, and textiles are a wonderful medium to convey the organic shapes of my artwork.

Stanford
University



Google



 **UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA**





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Photo by Robert Houser

Melissa Mahoney (U.S., b. 1965) is an abstract painter whose work features dynamic, circular brushstrokes.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, she grew up in a family of artists. She studied at the University of Georgia where she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts. She went on to complete graduate work in Cortona, Italy, studying calligraphy and hand lettering. Her calligraphy skills transferred to her abstract paintings, in which she uses a range of brushes including large, round, Chinese calligraphy brushes.

Her early works show her technical mastery and emphasis on realism. Her interests later shifted to abstraction, moving further away from the subject and working with only color, form, and texture in her paintings.

Mahoney is inspired by the Japanese aesthetic, especially the *ensō*, a Japanese word meaning “circle” that symbolizes strength and enlightenment. While an *ensō* is traditionally drawn in one continuous stroke, Melissa creates her circles with multiple brushstrokes and calls them Vortices. Her goal is to express balance and dynamic tension.

Both domestic and international collectors include Mahoney’s work in their portfolios. The US State Department recently selected one of her paintings for the US Ambassador’s Residence in Papua New Guinea. At TED2020 and at the TED2020 Staff Retreat, she led Art Discovery Sessions where and hands-on abstract painting workshops for TED attendees and staff.

Mahoney’s home and studio are in Palo Alto, California.

HONORS

Artist in Residency, CASP, Palo Alto, California, Resident Artist, July-October 2021

Selected by US Department of State,

Artwork placed in the Papua New Guinea US Ambassador’s Residence.

TED2020, Discovery Session Art Instructor.

TED 2020 Staff Retreat, Discovery Session Art Instructor

EXHIBITIONS / PARTIAL LIST

2023 — University of California Hastings Law School, San Francisco, California

2022 — ArtSpan, SFOS, San Francisco, California

2022 — Palo Alto Art Center, RESTART Exhibition, Juror: Patricia Hickson

2022 — Simon Breitbard Fine Arts, Trunk Show, San Francisco, California

2021 — CASP, Palo Alto, California, Open Studio, Resident Artist, July-October

2021 — Art in Action / Camper Restaurant / Melissa Mahoney, Culinary Series, Menlo Park, California

2020 — Google / Mahoney Artwork, Textiles, Google Merchandise Store, Mountain View, California

2019 — Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, California, Instructor of Abstract Painting Workshop

COLLABORATIONS

2022 — Kevin Barry Art Advisory, Los Angeles and San Francisco, California and nationwide

2022 — Laurie Ghielmetti Art Consultation, San Francisco, California

2021 — Chandra Cerrito Art Advisors, Napa, California

EXPRESSING EMOTIONS ABSTRACTLY

What color is happiness?

What forms create peace... or chaos?

There are no wrong answers. Expressing emotions through abstract painting can have a powerful effect on shifting your head space and to helping manifest your thoughts.

Melissa Mahoney, a “TEDster” and an abstract painter, created this lesson and video to share with adults, teenagers and children. She guides participants through the process of abstractly expressing emotions. Utilizing abstract art as a tool, it can help express emotions, process emotions and harness positivity.

Painting abstractly releases thoughts and emotions onto a canvas, utilizing only color and form.



Supplies range from conventional paint and canvas, to recycled cardboard and crayons, to digital tablets, to found objects such as recycled materials or to things found in nature.

Video lesson link on the Blog section of website:

[MahoneyArtwork.com/Blog](https://www.mahoneyartwork.com/blog)



“Open your mind and feed it well.”

—MELISSA MAHONEY



MAHONEYARTWORK.COM

