Beading


Natasha St. Michael is a bead weaver who creates three dimensional organic forms from glass seed beads and thread. Encouraged in artistic pursuits from an early age, her parents had hoped she would become a fashion designer. She took sewing classes as a pre-teen, but it wasn’t until her university years that she chose to go into fibre arts. In terms of fibre education, after attending primary and secondary school in Montreal, Natasha was encouraged by her high school art teacher to attend a pre-college program at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in 1992. She followed that up by getting her BFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in 1997.

Oh the Webs We Weave (1999), detail Hand woven glass beads, nylon thread 24” x 10” x ¼”

Photo Credit: Jocelyn Blais

While at SAIC, Natasha was encouraged to try any media that she desired, and after experimenting with ceramics, sound and performance art, she “focused in fibre arts, mainly hand painted fabric and batik. I love working with dyes and the chemistry (interaction) of translucent colors. I continued for a couple years working on hand painted fabric but found the flat surface too limiting. I needed to take it one step further, plus I was also searching for a medium that was non-toxic.” It was then that she took up bead weaving, something she had tried briefly during her BFA years.
About the process, she shared that “with the glass beads, it allowed me to develop three-dimensional forms, plus considering glass is transparent, it simultaneously allowed me to continue working with transparent color and experimenting with manipulating color by using a contrasting woven thread. Also the element of light and form became increasingly intriguing and taking the next step into beadwork opened new doors, new option and new things to discover and learn. It just worked.” Her incredibly intricate works are extremely labor-intensive in nature, with each piece taking between 2-5 months to complete, at 6-14 hours a day, everyday. Luckily for Natasha “the majority of the time it is soothing. There is something for me about repetition that puts me in a rhythm or calm, physically, mentally and spiritually.”
Germinate (2003) Hand woven glass beads, nylon thread 8.5” x 4” x 1” photo Credit: Paul Litherland

Natasha’s work shows her artistic progression in several ways. Beginning with using one color and one type of bead in her first works, she then begins to incorporate several types and colors of beads in a slightly three dimensional work, such as in Blue Cluster. Different beaded forms comprised of varied shapes and sizes of beads increasingly create a more three dimensional work that takes up more and varied space, and one can almost imagine that the works are alive, and capable of movement, and are better suited to their titles, such as Germinate and Coil.

Winged (2005) Hand woven glass beads, nylon thread 28” x 11” x 1.5” Photo Credit: Paul Litherland
Far more sculptural and organic in nature, her work begins to speak more of the body, and portrays her conceptual ideas around her beaded sculptures, relating that “it’s been an ongoing personal challenge in striving to convey a life cycle, specifically decay. Because the art works are made up of one form that is multiplied hundreds of times over and then inter-woven into a formation, an essence of multiplication, reproduction and continuum become a given. That continuum is my struggle, how to portray that the formation is in a cycle of growth, but that growth is in fact its decline. This challenge has been ongoing for many years, but because of this challenge this idea has evolved and new directions have come into fruition.”

Natasha has shown her work internationally to wide acclaim, garnering her prestigious awards, including the Prix François-Houdé in 2003, and the Juror’s Choice Award: Best of Show at Matrix Arts International 2001 exhibition at the Matrix Arts Gallery in Sacramento, California. She has received artist and travel grants from both the Conseil des arts et des letters du Québec, and from the Canada Council for the Arts. St. Michael’s work is held in both public and private collections in North America and France, and she has had two solo exhibitions and has exhibited in over 40 groups shows in North America.
America and overseas since 2000. After an extended work study in Australia since 2005, Natasha has recently returned to Montreal to continue to pursue her art as a full time professional artist. As you can see below, her work has once again evolved.

Sprouted (2007) Hand woven glass beads, nylon thread 29” x 16” x 4.5” Photo Credit: Paul Litherland

Natasha is currently represented by the Crea Gallery and nee nah boutique in Montreal, as well as the Sandra Ainsley Gallery in Toronto. Upcoming shows include: SOFA Chicago 2007, at Booth 226 in November 2007, and Objets de Cultures at MATERIA and La Maison Hamel-Bruneau (Québec), from January 18 - March 16, 2008. Recent exhibitions included: Pindemonium 2007 at Articule Gallery in Montreal, Hush Lush at Piedmont Arts, in Martinsville, Virginia, PalmBeach3 at Palm Beach County Convention Center in West Palm Beach, Florida, and Savoir re-faire la tradition at the Musée des maîtres et artisans du Québec, in Montréal.

All information presented in this profile (including verbatim quotes) was from an internet oral history interview between Natasha St. Michael and J. Penney Burton conducted in December 2006, and from the artist’s C.V.

Natasha’s website is available at: http://natashastmichael.com/

photo credits:

Oh the Webs We Weave (1999), detail. Hand woven glass beads, nylon thread

24” x 10” x 3¼” Photo Credit: Jocelyn Blais

Blue Cluster (2000) Hand woven glass beads, nylon thread
10.5” x 6.5” x 1.5” Photo Credit: Paul Litherland

Germinate (2003) Hand woven glass beads, nylon thread 8.5” x 4” x 1”

Photo Credit: Paul Litherland

Winged (2005) Hand woven glass beads, nylon thread 28” x 11” x 1.5”

Photo Credit: Paul Litherland