

Emily Cadwell, Fine Arts

University: University of Missouri-Columbia
Year in School: Junior
Hometown: Columbia, Missouri
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Josephine Stealey, Fine Arts (Fibers)
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Exploring tradition, innovation, and visual language through a multi-media approach

Emily Cadwell and Josephine Stealey

This research provided an opportunity to improve my technical execution and expression of personally significant conceptual themes, in order to develop an individual style and visual language. Throughout my college education, work on this project will be continued towards launching a career as a professional artist in a public exhibition with multi-media fiber/paint pieces with the same unified themes of the tarot and visual narration. Tarot divination cards were used as inspiration in honor of remembering the traditions of the past. The intent was to portray individual cards in a visual language that was both readable to modern culture, and expressive of personal memories and beliefs. The creative process for this project began with research into the astrological and elemental basis of individual cards and exploration of the work of modern artist's who combined fiber and painting mediums, used visual narration, or put their own personal spin on the tarot. As part of the brainstorming process, a series of thumbnail sketches were created in order to workout formal issues and express concepts visually. A full-sized reproduction of the chosen thumbnail for each piece was created and revamped if necessary, then used as a template for the final piece. Before the final pieces could be created, a series of fourteen different samples were used to test out which processes and mediums would be best suited for the final works. Methods and mediums tested include: shibori, batik, various fabric resists and discharges, immersion and batch dyeing methods, hand-embroidery stitches, machine-stitching, couching, hand beading, and various methods of applying gesso and paint to portions of cotton fabric. A valuable conclusion arrived at through this research, are how it is very important to view the work of other artists, and to sketch, plan, and test techniques prior to creating successful final pieces of artwork. Preparation counts. Additionally, it is important to stretch fabric prior to painting portions of it, even if it will be removed from the stretchers for final presentation, otherwise the gesso and paint create permanent wrinkles in the fabric. This project requires continued research in order to reconcile whether painting or fiber techniques should hold more dominance or equal standing in my art, and to discover a similar balance between figures and backgrounds. Most importantly, developing diligent habits and work ethics are necessary for becoming a professional artist.