

Maysey Craddock: **FACES** of Memphis



Maysey Craddock's artwork, so rich with pattern, texture and dimension, is, like the artist, inviting and approachable. In a complicated process with an unconventional eye, she creates an almost ghostly representation of the landscapes she observes, successfully capturing the essence of her subjects. We caught up with her in the exhibition space for *A Different Kind of Landscape*, where her works on paper currently hang alongside those by Erin Harmon at the [Memphis Brooks Museum of Art](#). We know you'll love meeting Maysey and seeing some of her masterpieces below!

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Memphis, then lived in New Orleans and Munich, Germany before I moved back here in 2008.

What inspires you in both your artwork and your day to day life?

Inspiration is a tricky word. You never know when or if it's going to hit and what triggers it. My artwork rarely comes from an a-ha moment or a bolt of

lightning. Instead, it is a constant unfolding that happens because I am really dedicated to the discipline of work. I really believe that the saying “out of the work comes the work” (John Cage) is a true one for me. Inspiration is not a moment, it is a constant journey. But I would say that observation is key—being quiet, noticing the quality of something overlooked, keeping my mind open for new images in unexpected places. I try to keep an awareness of the world I move through. This happens in the studio, on walks, in the kitchen, with friends. It all comes together in a life inside and outside the studio.

What are your hobbies when you’re not making beautiful art?

I love to cook, to think about cooking, and I love reading cookbooks. It is very creative for me—different textures, tastes, proportions. I read recipes all the time but rarely follow them. Usually they serve as a jumping off point. I also love a good long walk.

Have you always been an artist or did you have a different career path before making this your “day job”?

I worked for about three or four years right out of college, but I am really fortunate to have been able to work full-time as an artist since about age 27. It’s very challenging, very unpredictable, but the freedom of working for myself and doing what I love is incredibly gratifying. There is so much more to it than painting in the studio. I also have to be a business person: keeping track of inventory and contracts with galleries or agents, promotion, writing. It is a very nuanced and complicated profession.

Where did you study art?

I studied sculpture and anthropology in undergraduate school at Tulane and received my MFA from Maine College of Art in Portland in 2003.

Best piece of advice you’ve been given?

When I was about 24, I met an older woman artist and asked her if I could come see her studio. She took me first to her file cabinet! She explained that she thought it was important for me to see that a lot of research, thought and

background work, not to mention business practices, go into the artist's career. When I was leaving, she just simply said to me, "You can do this if it is what you want." Not exactly advice, but knowing that it was even possible to be an artist made a big impression on me.



How many of your works are on view at the Brooks? Are these all from private collections?

I have 12 pieces in the show. Most are from private collections here in Memphis, but a few of them are still available through [David Lusk Gallery](#).

It's a major accomplishment to have an exhibition of your work at the Brooks Museum! How does that make you feel?

It has been so rewarding to work with Marina Pacini, who is the curator there, and with Erin Harmon, the other artist in the show. We have gotten together at various points during the past six months and talked about our ideas of landscape and the work we are doing. The whole process has felt very collaborative and has been a lot of fun. I have been hoping for some kind of museum show, even a group show, for several years now and I am thrilled not only that it is happening so soon, but also that it is happening at the Brooks Museum here in Memphis. I grew up going there and some of the works in their collection are really seared into my early visual memory.

Where else can we see your work? In how many galleries/states are you represented?

In Memphis, my work can be seen at David Lusk Gallery, with whom I've been working since the very beginning in 1996. He is a fantastic promoter, agent and mentor, and he shows my work not only here in Memphis but throughout the United States at various art fairs. I also work with Cris Worley Fine Arts in Dallas and the Sears Peyton Gallery in New York City.

How did you get the idea to paint on paper bags stitched together?

Now, that actually might have been a stroke of inspiration! I went up to Maine to start graduate school, and I had brought all kinds of fancy art supplies and expensive papers up there with me. It quickly became clear to me that I was going to have to throw out my old rule book. I knew I needed to work with materials that weren't precious, so I turned around, and there a bag was waiting. It was surprising because I didn't expect it to be such a great surface for watercolors. It has taken about ten years to evolve into the large stitched "canvases" I am working on now. I really like how the bags make the paintings also feel like sculptures. I'm interested in the history of use, the patina and the terrain of the bags. They are objects that would normally be discarded, and this is like a mirror for the subjects I paint in my work.

What fall 2013 event are you most excited about in Memphis?

One thing I am personally excited about is something I have been working on with ArtsMemphis. I have gotten together with a group of Memphis artists and ArtsMemphis to develop the first ever grant program for individual visual artists. We have five grants of \$3000 that will be awarded in November. This is a huge step for the local artist community. ArtsMemphis does so many good things, but up until now they have only supported larger arts organizations (like theater & ballet) and 501c3 organizations. Artists are out there on their own, and it is really hard for us to find support. We pay our own health insurance, self employment tax and generally don't have the umbrella support of a larger organization. I am excited to see what kinds of new connections are made in the visual arts community.

Favorite travel destination?

Perdido, Alabama

What book(s) are currently on your bedside table?

The Moviegoer by Walker Percy

Name three lighthearted things you cannot live without.

Water (I love Memphis water!); traveling (I sometimes really need a change of scenery, and then it is so nice to come home); and my studio, which is more than just a place to work



Here, the artist gives us a lesson on her technique.



A close-up of one of Maysey's pieces available at David Lusk Gallery. Her canvases are literally composed of old paper bags sewn together