

Artist Statement

"In the Belly of the Empress by Melissa Staiger"

"In the Belly of the Empress" is an ongoing series, started in the winter of 2021. It is influenced by the memories of works created outdoors. These small works allow me to move and experiment freely through the drawing and painting process. I've used caran d'ache or watercolor pencil for the pencil structure and gouache and acrylic paint for the bright solid colors.

The abstracted forms are organic, and have a sense of a figure present. They feel like botany in an internal space. The colors are lush, rich and regal - with shiny silver color, fitting for an Empress. Many of the paintings have a central composition with forms that grow and radiate outwardly in wave-like patterns.

In the tarot, the Empress card depicts a peaceful woman who has every luxury she needs. In this series, I was imagining what she might be eating. Are there flowers on her meals? What is she digesting? The Empress card can also stand for pregnancy in the physical sense, ideas you are harboring, or, what projects you are giving birth to.

The "Empress" can take "mental health days" whenever she needs. Her life is balanced and free. During this stressful pandemic time, I was worried about family and friends, like everyone. I find myself creating art projects in new places. I started arranging a seashell garden around the trees by the curb, or a two-floor mirrored textile work in the air shaft of my building, and a rustic rooftop garden.

The title of this exhibition was inspired by and pays tribute to Niki de Saint Phalle's photograph in the "Belly of the Empress". It features a lavish mirrored mosaic dining room she built in her Tarot Garden in Italy.