

Mel Rea

Mel Rea completed her BFA in Ceramics from Kent State University, where she created large figurative pieces with intricate details, such as tiny fingernails, eyelashes, and earlobes. Her figures often featured imaginary characters, while some referenced historical figures. She held a particular affection for Egyptian and Japanese cultural dress traditions. Mel's passion for clay artistry spanned nearly 17 years.

As time went on, Mel longed to set clay aside and explore painting. One day, she discovered a small batch of beeswax in a dust-covered bucket in her grandmother's basement, remnants from her grandfather's last beehives. Mel's grandfather spent his childhood in Russia, where he was inspired to build an apiary. His dream was realized as an adult in the United States, where he farmed his beehives. Interestingly, her full name, Melissa, means "honeybee" in Greek. As a young girl, Mel felt a deep sense of peace walking among her grandfather's hives, which nurtured her appreciation for Mother Nature.

Like many artists, nature became a constant source of inspiration for her. That old batch of beeswax facilitated Mel's transition into painting as an encaustic artist, using molten beeswax. The history of encaustics, tracing back to Greek artists as early as the 5th century B.C., resonated with Mel's sense of nostalgia. The craftsmanship in encaustic painting provided a smooth transition from clay sculpting to painting. She was captivated by the soft satin finish of the beeswax, which replaced her love of lush clay glazes. The depth of the encaustic medium allowed Mel to carve, scratch, and incise elegant, clean lines, satisfying her affinity for sculptural surfaces.

After several years dedicated to encaustic painting, Mel began to explore more traditional mediums. She connected with the drying pace and versatile application of acrylics, the swift mark-making of pastels, the opaque intensity of gouache, and the texture of oil sticks. Mel utilizes layers of varied paints and application methods—brushing, splashing, dripping, spraying, and scraping. This diverse play with paint creates a lively energy in her compositions. Mel's paintings feature abstract assemblies of colorful lines and shapes that intersect in multiple sheer layers. Though often suggestive, her shapes do not rely on concrete portrayals as they once did when she worked with clay. Instead, evocative forms interweave across her canvases, alluding to themes of romance, botanicals, humor, or sensuality. Mel frequently draws inspiration from Japanese aesthetics, her deep love for animals, and the vastness of the natural world. Through her use of color and thoughtful composition, Mel conveys a deeper sense of self, allowing an abstracted anatomy to communicate without a specific narrative. Believing that thoughts shape reality, Mel is mindful of where her imagination dwells, carefully channeling thoughts that evoke warmth and connection with her viewers.