

Melissa Sarris

15 Elm Street, Chatham NY 12037

www.melissasarris.com melissasarris2@gmail.com @stitchnexchange

Specializing in organized events and constructed situations

fostering human interaction, connection and exchange.

Motivation: bringing the outsider in.

Education

2013, MFA in Sculpture, University of Albany, Albany, NY

1987, BFA in Photography with honors, School of Visual Arts, NYC, NY

Teaching

2015-Present. Siena College, Loudonville, NY.

Basic Design 1 Hands on studio art course offered to students with a variety of majors. The course focuses on the principles and elements of design and offers diverse artist examples to prompt connections between materials, processes and metaphorical ideas. Students are encouraged to experiment with an array of media including gouache, acrylics, ink, and air drying clay with creative problem solving the goal to best meet the requirements for each assignment. Reinvigorated existing curriculum to include color theory and three dimensional design concepts.

Introduction to Visual Arts Updated curriculum for a lecture survey art course that goes well beyond the canon. This course focuses on the history, culture and ideas of art, through the lens of contemporary art. To assist students with little prior experience or knowledge of art, the course is taught using a "rhizomatic" system that encourages students to make connections between artist ideas, processes and materials. A snapshot of class time includes brief thematic presentations, students working in small groups to analyze class information, followed up with brief group and individual presentations.

Art in a Carceral State Created and taught this new course after receiving a Summer Pedagogy Fellowship from Siena College in 2021 in collaboration with the new Criminal Justice program. This course examines the historical, cultural and political legacy of our current state of mass incarceration through the lens of art. By exploring contemporary themes and practices in art including art made by currently and formerly incarcerated artists, students engage in a variety of hands-on art making to explore the limitations of making art behind bars. The course includes multiple guest artists and speakers working with justice impacted artists.

2015-2020 Columbia County Jail, Hudson, NY. Art programming for men and women in partnership with ReEntry Columbia. Projects include 2-D collage, paint, and clay works with the intent of using art processes to relieve stress and foster personal expression.

2017 Roarke Center, Troy NY. Summer Collaboration with teaching artist/sculptor Madison LaVallee and photographer Jason van Staveren to create socially engaged programming for Roarke Center participants. Project culminated in an exhibition at the Troy Center for the arts titled Our Place, with a public engagement event at the opening.

2016 Brookwood Secure Center, Hudson, NY. Summer High School Art teacher for 14-19 year old boys. Created curriculum that included, painting, print making, drawing, and clay, using limited materials/tools allowed within the restrictions of the facility.

2014 Chatham Elementary School. Created art programming for Kid's Club, a summer program for children 5-12 years old in conjunction with Art School of Columbia County, using a grant from Berkshire Taconic Foundation. Projects dovetailed with Kid's Club themes including the environment, farm to table, and culminated with a completely children-run carnival.

2014 Chatham Public Library. Created a wire sculpture workshop for children titled Enabling Your Abilities, where children reverse engineered computer equipment to create a wearable artwork that would give them "super powers." This project was originally developed while teaching college students at University of Albany and adapted for this younger audience.

2011-2013 University of Albany. Instructor for Three-Dimensional Design. Responsible for curriculum development and all instruction, studio supervision, demonstrations, and grading. Developed new course materials and projects.

Recent Projects

2019-present *StitchingExchange* An ongoing project using the tools, skills and language of sewing and embroidery as a common language for creative expression and build community for immigrants in the Capital District.

2019 *StitchingExchange* Using the tools, skills and language of sewing and embroidery as a common language for creative expression and build community for immigrants at Hudson Family Literacy in Hudson, NY.

2018 *HipHopSew* Translating the tempo, beat and rhythm of Hip Hop and Rap music into color, pattern and quilt design with youth ages 5-16 at the Troy Boys and Girls Club, Troy, NY.

2018 *Embroidery Project* Formed an ad-hoc embroidery group throughout the Capital district where participants embroidered the thoughts written by incarcerated men and women, with support from Columbia ReEntry, Hudson, NY.

2018 *BitterSweet* Art making workshops combining clay, abstraction, human emotion and chocolate. Workshop groups included: Men and women from the Columbia County Jail, Apogee, an Adult peer mental health support group, and the Youth Clubhouse, a space for at risk teens. Workshop participants became collaborators at a public engagement event at an area library.

2017 *Feminist Love Letter* Public engagement event during the Nasty Women of the North Exhibition, a fundraiser for Planned Parenthood. Collar Works Gallery, Troy NY. Event featured 12 manual typewriters participants typed letters to: their former/future feminist self, family member or a historical/professional woman from any era.

2017 *Everyday Experts* Received a grant through Troy Public Art, Summer Square, a regional pilot program assisting artists doing public art. Event included five locals presenting their special skills, interests and talents. Participants ranged from a tall bike rider, grain historian/pancake maker, and an immigrant hairdresser with 45+ years of experience demonstrated his craft.

2017 *Sewn Together: Quilts, Incarceration, and Community* A series of quilt making workshops using the social history, culture, and craft of quilts as a means to reflect on issues of incarceration in Columbia County and its impact on families. Hand sewing workshops with

children from Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood and the Columbia County Jail, sanctioned by Captain Thomas Lanphear and Sheriff Bartlett by using a visual system for bringing in contraband items such as needles, pins, and scissors inside the jail.

2016 *Vacant Buildings Vanished Dreams* Received a grant from Workforce Development and worked in collaboration with Branda Miller of The Sanctuary for Independent Media and Filmmaker Julie Casper Roth to create an interactive neighborhood tour featuring video in situ and an interactive online map (Affinity project associated with Breathing Lights.) <http://www.mediasanctuary.org/VacantBuildingsVanishedDreams>

2015 *Chocolate Beyond the Bars* Repair the World Gallery, Brooklyn NY. In Collaboration with Heather Hart. Adapted a project created for an art class taught at the Columbia County Jail.

2015 *Drawing from Memory* Culture Lounge, Staten Island Arts, Staten Island, NY. Ferry riders en route to Staten Island were invited to call a toll free number to tell a childhood memory. An artist answers in a gallery at the St. George Ferry Terminal and makes a drawing while they listen. <https://drawingfrommemory.wordpress.com>

2014 *Art Omi Audio Walking Tour* Art Omi, Ghent, NY. Edited audio stories told by past artists in residence about the place of Art Omi. <https://soundcloud.com/melissasarris/sets/omi-stories-a-self-guided>

Awards

2024 *Stitching Exchange* ECAR (Every Campus A Refuge) grant, Russell Sage College

2023 *Stitching Exchange* Community Engagement grant from the Rensselaer County Council on the Arts

2022 *Stitching Exchange* Community Engagement grant from the Rensselaer County Council on the Arts.

2021 *Artistic Expression in the Carceral State* Summer Pedagogy Fellowship from Siena College.

2020 *Stitching Exchange* Community Engagement grant from the Rensselaer County Council on the Arts.

2019 *Stitching Exchange* Community Engagement grant from the Columbia County Council on the Arts.

2019 *Stitching Exchange* Community Engagement grant from the Rensselaer County Council on the Arts.

2018 *HipHopSew* Community Engagement grant from the Rensselaer County Council on the Arts.

2018 *BitterSweet* Community Engagement grant from the Greene County Council on the Arts.

2017 *Everyday Experts* Troy Public Art grant in Summer Square, Troy, NY

2017 *Sewn Together* Quilts, Incarceration, and Community. Community Engagement grant from the Greene County Council on the Arts.

2014 *Art Agency* Individual Artist Grant from the Greene County Council on the Arts for my project with the community of Chatham Village.

Curation

2024 *Beyond the Margins: Art as Transformation* Standish Library, Siena College, Loudonville NY. Curated exhibition of works by students and justice impacted artists.

2019 *InFauxStructure* Opalka Gallery, Albany NY. Co-curated with Julie Casper Roth and Madison LaVallee of exhibition of artists responding to Infrastructure.

2018 *Dislocations* Collar Works Gallery, Troy NY. Co-curated with Evelyne Leblanc-Roberge of exhibition of artists responding to mass incarceration.

2014 *Frames of Reference* Sanctuary Gallery, Canaan, NY. Guest-curated a 13 person group show, pairing art works made by congregation members with younger artists from the community

Shows

2019 *EnMasse* Thompson Giroux Gallery, Chatham NY. Part of a popular small works group show

2018 *They Made the Cut* Spencertown Academy, Spencertown, NY. Group show of artists who use cutting as part of their process.

2016 *Chatham Meadows* Chatham, NY, Columbia County Council for the Arts. Presented Landscape as Soundscape in a group show of outdoor sculpture.

2015 *Beyond the Bars* Green County Council for the Arts, Catskill, NY. A group show of artists working around issues of incarceration.

2015 *Give and Take* Green County Council for the Arts, Catskill, NY. A group show of past recipients awarded a Decentralization Individual Artist Grant.

2013 *Glimpses and Fragments* Joyce Goldstein Gallery, Chatham, NY. Installation of video, text and images of life in Mbarara, Uganda. Collaboration with Michael and Jaina Wollowitz.

2013 *Disconnect* Torpedo Factory Art Center, Alexandria, VA.

Community Activities

2019-2025 Volunteer at the Up-Stitch store, Albany, NY.

2015-2020 Volunteer art projects offered at the Columbia County Jail through ReEntry Columbia, an organization providing services for returning citizens.

2016-2018. Chatham Public Library Advisory committee member.

2016-2018 Chatham Village Zoning Board updating committee.

2015 Summer.Arts liaison for CABA, (Chatham Village Business Association.) Received grants creating more community engagement during the 39th annual Summer Fest, a village wide event.

2013-2016. Art Stakeholders of Chatham School District. Worked with several local non-profit arts organizations to develop more coordination and collaboration within the community.

2013-2015 Chatham Village Comprehensive Plan Update. Art and Culture liaison.

2013-2015 Art School of Columbia County, board member and community engagement specialist.

2009-2011 Habitat for Humanity board member. Organized the first Woman Build in Columbia County and project development for Semi Annual Art auction.

Previous Body of Work

2002-Present Created contemporary, functional quilts made with hand dyed cottons. Exhibited in many juried craft shows nationally including American Craft Council; Baltimore, Atlanta, St. Paul, and San Francisco