

**MONIQUE MARTIN ARTIST STATEMENT:** My work often uses significant symbols or comments on contemporary social issues. I create bodies of work rather individual pieces and focus on specific concepts, I undertake extensive research prior to creating my work, often incorporating historically significant symbols and images to express my ideas. My works push the boundaries of standard printmaking: enormous scale printmaking, installation-based printmaking and working with three dimensions in printmaking.

Every action, interaction, and observation produce an energy that vibrates within me and connects me to the people with whom I am in contact. Sometimes a small incident, a promise only half-intended, a touch, or a casual remark, can set off a chain of events that will alter lives and change destinies. Like a pebble in a pond, the rings of energy keep moving outward from the initial touch, whether it is physical, emotional, spiritual or mental. In responding to these ever-changing ripples in the connections between humans that inspires my art work. My work utilizes ever-changing concepts and images because my art is a way of exploring who I am, who I was, who I will become, and where I fit into the world around me.

**MONIQUE MARTIN BIOGRAPHY:** Monique is a multi-disciplinary artist from Saskatoon, Canada. She has exhibited her artwork in more than 242 significant solo, invited and juried group exhibitions in ten countries. More than 50 of these were solo exhibitions in public galleries. Renowned international curators have selected her artwork for various exhibitions worldwide. Her works are held in more than forty-four public and private collections in ten different countries.

Monique was Artist-in-Residence for Disneyland Paris, Paris, France (2013), the Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan Festival (2013), the Saskatchewan Children's Festival (2012), Bytown Museum, Ottawa, Canada (2010), Spalding, United Kingdom (2008), Nice, France (2006), Vallauris, France (2006), Mount Vernon, USA (2004), Wynyard, Tasmania, Australia (2003) and Coaticook, QC, Canada (2001).

This publication accompanies the exhibition ***Context is Everything*** presented at the Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, from **November 20, 2020 – January 15, 2021**.

**Cover Image:** *Context is Everything*, installation close up, Monique Martin, Estevan Art Gallery & Museum, 2020

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## MONIQUE MARTIN: AN INTERVIEW

The following is an e-mail interview conducted between Director/Curator Amber Andersen and artist Monique Martin. The interview was conducted via e-mail between on November 18 - 19, 2020.

AMBER ANDERSEN) In the exhibition, *Context is Everything*, you have created over 1,300 paper dandelions using printmaking techniques, specifically silk screen. Each one involving multiple layers of colour and include other processes such as paper folding and cutting. In regards to thinking of this intensive process, is this about pushing the limits of what is considered printmaking? So many of your other bodies of works also deal/incorporate work intensive processes that also speak about the environment. Is there a correlation, for you, between the two?

MONIQUE MARTIN) Each dandelion uses two different printmaking techniques. There is a very subtle yellow line printed on each petal of each dandelion, to create the illusion of a fold. The leaves of the dandelions use a linocut technique with various greens to make each leaf unique. Each leaf is also folded prior to inking to create the veins in the leaves and each leaf is inked individually, front and back. Each dandelion contains anywhere from 8 to 20 leaves. Each dandelion required 300 little small slits cut to make each strip of paper that was curled to make the flower.

I do like to push the limits of printmaking, taking it into new areas that are not as commonly explored. I enjoy the challenge of sculptural printmaking. I also do like in the installation possibilities with printmaking. It is a great medium to use to create multiples, whether 2000 dandelions (I have 2000) or to make 54,000 hexagons for the 3,500 printed bees in my series "Continuous". I do enjoy the challenge of filling an entire space and making it an experience for the viewer rather than just viewing works on the wall, these installations become a little more immersive. With my bee series the viewer is actually immersed in human size beehive with sound and smell.

I'm very interested in nature and how humans interact with nature. Sometimes we try to stop nature from doing what it wants to do, like the dandelion, and or we make it produce more of what we want, like the bee making honey. So, the dandelions and bees, for me, are both great ways to look at these ideas. People don't enjoy dandelions in

general, society is very much in love with the perfect lawn. This exhibition is about accepting everyone and everything for what it is and not wanting to exist in a monoculture, not wanting to make everything look the same.

AA) You speak about the dandelion as a symbol for strength, resilience and adversity. You exhibited some of your dandelion pieces in our outdoor summer exhibition aptly titled *Inside/Out*. You also had to reconfigure other exhibitions during COVID-19, to ensure they would happen. Has the pandemic shifted how you consider your practice? There are so many ways to work with this particular installation. It lends itself, through its physicality, to adapting to any space. Is it happenstance? Or was it part of the consideration for selecting the dandelion in the first place?

MM) when I started this series of dandelions, I knew that I wanted to be unique in each venue using each gallery shape and lighting that it has. It is really important to me that each of my exhibitions is a unique experience in each venue.

Covid19 has caused some re-shifting of my exhibitions, in particular some of the exhibitions have become only viewable through windows, but because it is a dandelion it seems to kind of thrive in this COVID-19 climate and people really enjoyed seeing at this distance (from the street or sidewalk, looking in). It was an interesting juxtaposition in the recent exhibition in Edmonton where the viewers were outside and the dandelion was inside.

I wouldn't say that I selected the dandelions. I think they selected me. I let my ideas come to me in a very organic way, I don't ever suffer from artist block, I have way too many ideas for that. I write ideas down, all of my ideas even if I think they are sort of silly. I do this for a long time. My 'sketchbooks' are mostly writing about ideas, and my thoughts on the world. It would surprise you to look in my sketchbook and see very few sketches. I go back in sketchbooks often looking for similarities, concepts or ideas that repeat and then build upon a concept with research which can take anywhere from one year to 18 months. I am working on new ideas as I am creating a previous body of work. I have three or four things going at once.

However, I do visualize my art work as an entire body of work. I rarely work on individual pieces that I see as a standalone piece. I tend towards larger subject matter or larger ideas that encompass an entire exhibition and that

do create a bit of a 'wow' factor. I want the viewers to go 'wow' when walking into the gallery.

AA) What originally inspired you to create this exhibition?

MM) The original inspiration for this exhibition was the dandelions I saw growing in the ditch along the road, the big ones, which are actually called Western Goat's Beard. They are larger than a dandelion. I was driving down the road and I wondered why this flower that's so gorgeous and has such gorgeous seed is dismissed. I also wondered why we pamper and so carefully tend, water and give the right amount of sunshine to the flowers in our garden. It is interesting how 'the weed' is so durable and so strong is tossed away. Some of the flower are weak, we work so hard to keep alive. This idea made me start to question the monoculture in our world and started to question racism and discrimination at the human level. From there the idea progressed into mental health, when people are shut out, left out or disregarded by society how does that affect their mental health, where do they sit with that as a human. Then I started thinking about the resilience of the dandelion. The perseverance of the dandelion, it doesn't give up, it never gives up. And thus, began my research into the dandelion.

I researched things like how many seeds it makes how many petals it has, how many flowers come out of one plant. It is interesting that when it came to Canada with the Europeans it was considered a flower. The dandelion transitioned from a flower to a weed and now it's gone back to a flower because you can actually buy dandelion seeds at a plant store where you purchase seeds. On the instruction package it talks about using the flower for wine and the leaves for salads and give instructions on how to do so. It's interesting to see how the dandelion has come full circle from being wanted to unwanted and now wanted again, it persevered through the challenging times. Once I completed extensive research on the dandelion, I worked at being able to render them properly. Once I understood the flower enough, and had created it using other mediums, I began the process of creating prototypes for this installation. I had to figure out how to make them, how long it would take to make them and if I had a strong enough concept for the creation of this installation, because creating it would take a big chunk of my life, months, possibly years and actually it did take 18 months. I had to be very connected and attached to this idea of "Context is Everything" and all that it encompassed.

AA) While installing the exhibition we discussed how we were using lighting to encourage participants to engage with the works by walking through the lit central portion of the exhibition. This area is most brightly lit. There is a push and pull with this particular work. Lighting is significant in accentuating the tromp l'oeil (to fool the eye) aspect of these artworks. Was the tromp l'oeil effect employed to have audiences' question what they were looking at? Is it also a way to encourage a longer time spent with the installation? Not only do these dandelions fool the eye but they also trick the viewer into engaging with the art work longer which is the zeitgeist of the work, to have a deeper look and consideration at perception?

MM) I like to use tromp l'oeil effect for viewers. I like to put things where they don't belong so that people question why they are there. This experience often has them looking and seeing things differently in their world. After creating my nest series people told me they noticed empty nests in trees, when they didn't before. Maybe people will notice a dandelion in the cracks of the sidewalk, or the cracks of the wall and think of the resilience and strength of this little flower/weed. Context is Everything.

AA) What's next?

MM) I'm always creating, always exploring new ideas filling my sketchbook with plans, dreams and hopes. Right now, I'm working on a series of miniatures using a collage technique. It looks at what we did during the pandemic not what the pandemic was not Covid-19, but rather how humans reacted, what we did with our free time, our lack of space, working from home, etc.....

I'm also researching and working a series about time, how we use it, misuse it, think about it, worry about and waste it. This work is slowly evolving over time, sorry for the pun. I started researching time over a year ago and am now really starting to build the actual pieces.