

*the tiniest element has a purpose, a sparkle, a voice...*

I've been fascinated with paper and color, multiples, collage and boxes from childhood. Paper dolls and their clothes, images from packaged goods and magazines, stamps and all manner of different letters and alphabets all appealed to me. Something about finding and accumulating these items was exciting and important.

Years later when I saw my first Joseph Cornell sculpture in the Guggenheim Museum in Venice I was startled and then validated in an important way. Cornell had chosen similar objects and combined them in a way that felt familiar to me.

I now create collage and assemblage works with textiles, wood, glass, metal and various found objects. Original painted works on paper, beads or stones might also be incorporated. The works are non-representational and many contain invented symbols and repetitive motifs and markings. The square shape I often employ provides a structured format for the many elements that make up each work. Sometimes pieces are made of up a sequence of squares arranged horizontally. Sometimes many small squares form a larger one.

Many works also contain bundles. In 1998, I wrapped a series of dowels in fabric, glued gems on either end and joined them together to make my first sacred bundle. For me these bundles are containers of story and energy and a link to collective consciousness. Bundles may be bound with cord or string, chain or wire. The wrapping and binding process is deliberate and repetitive, a meditation that secures the intention, story and mystery.

Whether an object is handmade, created by nature or a found remnant, I feel a great sense of accomplishment from joining seemingly disparate items to create a synchronous whole. An awareness and transformation occurs as these elements are brought together for the first time and become part of a larger social context. Sometimes I imagine I'm retelling an event from another time that creates new experience or language. Or a piece becomes an embodiment of desires or the preservation of a dialogue from the past or future.

I can still recall the feeling, as a young child, of first holding shiny paper and cutting easily and cleanly with precision. Through the years, the need to create and embellish deepens; the tiniest element has a purpose, a sparkle, a voice.

Ellen Devens  
2017