
Artist Statement / Reni Gower

My artwork recognizes geometric perfection as the matrix of humanity. Since ancient times, perfect forms (circle, square, and triangle) have been thought to convey sacred and universal truths by reflecting the fractal interconnections of the natural world. One finds these similarities embedded in decorative patterns around the globe. Incorporating these designs into contemporary artwork promotes understanding through a shared perspective that can reinforce cross-cultural bonds.

Historically, Islamic artists appropriated key elements from the classical traditions of Ancient Greece, Rome, and Persia to create a new decorative style based upon geometry. Through ongoing migrations, comparable interlaced motifs and meanings are also found in Celtic designs. Likewise, I produce new geometric iterations based upon the traditional patterns embedded in Islamic tile work and woven Celtic knots. Cut by hand, some imperfection does occur in my artwork. Despite this discrete difference, a sense of unity prevails. Tied to the belief humankind cannot achieve godlike perfection, my slow labor intensive process is meditative and prayer-like for both the maker and the viewer.

For the papercuts, stencils are traced and hand cut into large single sheets of painted paper. To produce the pulp paintings, stencils tiled into a nine-square grid and cut out of Mylar are used to mask the complex patterns onto handmade paper with pulp painting techniques. For the Gelli prints, acrylic paint is applied through the stencils and transferred by burnishing to paper. Some may be overprinted numerous times or hand painted as well. The artwork may be installed singly or 4" apart in variable combinations.

Given our troubled times, my art speaks to a shared artistic legacy between the West and the Middle East with hope and optimism. Viewer response worldwide has confirmed the prevalent yet profound spiritual and emotional qualities of color, light, and pattern central to my art. Through the universal language of sacred geometry, my art celebrates slow work made by hand, while it counters visual skimming and encourages quiet reflection. As such, it is a perfect conduit for conversations that embrace cultural awareness through mindfulness and mutual respect.

Bio: Reni Gower received a 2020 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. In 2017, she was awarded SECAC's Award for Outstanding Artistic Achievement. In 2014, she received the College Art Association's Distinguished Teacher of Art Award, as well as distinguished teaching awards from Virginia Commonwealth University and VCUarts. Her art work is represented in many prestigious collections and has been exhibited at international and national venues for over 40 years. In addition to her painting practice, she curates award winning traveling exhibitions that include *FLASHPOINTS: Material / Intent / Fused*, *Geometric Aljamía: a Cultural Transliteration*, and *Pulped Under Pressure: The Art of Handmade Paper*. After 37 years, Professor Emerita Gower retired from Virginia Commonwealth University in December 2018. Gower is represented by Chroma Projects, Charlottesville, VA.