

Seen and Received: An Almanac

Life is a ride on a winding road. En route we may discover that what we were carrying with us has blown out of the window and is gone. Then there's an opportunity to get creative and see what we can make out of what we have.

Many years ago I started working with punch needle embroidery and fell in love with what I could do with it. I dedicated myself to deepening my skill, translating my vision into thread paintings using this technique. But time and my body have informed me that I can no longer sit so much and make such small repetitive movements without painful consequences. In 2015, I wanted to get back to work after being out of my studio for a year because of illness. Starting again, I had such a mix of feelings. I was bereft at losing my old friend punch needle, longing to get back to making things, scared of starting over, filled with self-doubt and self-confidence, excited and uncertain about trying something new. My spirit always wants to make art, yet I truly needed a change in my work in order to respect my body's needs.

I gave myself an assignment. The project was to make one small piece each month, each piece to be about something that moved me during that month. The entire cycle of twelve pieces would tell me a story of my year. All the pieces would be about the same size, using fabric and thread in any way. Having a deadline each month helped me to keep moving forward and get past the doubt.

As always, I wanted to make pieces with stories that sprang from important experiences, dreams and learnings in my life. I was excited about using some of the fabric and thread that I had accumulated over the years that didn't fit my previous work. It was necessary to let go of using the punch needle as my primary technique (the scariest change of all). My body needed to move around more when I worked, to work standing and sitting.

The experiences that fueled the images range from pleasure in the coinciding magic of the lyrics of a song and the dark inward drawing of winter (*Rabbit Moon*, January) to grief over the untimely death of a friend (*Presence Absence*, March). There is pure joy at the incredible energy of growth in the summer (*Bloom Boom*, June), celebration of a long time friendship and the spirits that carry us along (*2 Old Friends*, August) and recognition of the work two people do when they join as one (*New Sprouting*, April). Prayers and wishes for recovery overflow in February (*The Healing Cup*) while in July (*All Right*) there's celebration of the unexpected conviction that despite all my worrying I am all right. *Peace* (October) was made so that I could relive the experience of a reunion with the ocean. Several of the pieces (*Ancient Beanstalks*, May, *Circles, Strands*, September, *Between Us*, December) emerged from dreamlike experiences in which time becomes immaterial and gifts of healing flow freely between my ancestors and me. Each month is a different time and whatever experiences, feelings, or journeys shone particularly bright got digested into that month's piece.

When I started making these monthly pieces I doubted that the magic I created with my old friend punch needle embroidery would be present. What I discovered during the year was, however, as one piece after another emerged the 12 stood, and communicated with each other as a whole organism.

This project, *Seen and Received: An Almanac*, did everything I wished for and more. It got me back into my studio, engaged and excited me and allowed my body some peace. It really opened my eyes to possible ways of making and seeing images in new lights.

Missy Stevens
August 2016