

Interview with Sheree Rasmussen for the Textile Art Magazine

Where did you grow up and where do you live now?

I grew up in Toronto, Canada, and now divide my time between Strasbourg, France, and Warkworth, Ontario, a small village in the countryside northeast of Toronto.

How did your mother influence your textile approach?

I only fully recognized my mother's influence on my work later in life. She was primarily a homemaker, but she also knitted and sewed all of my clothing, worked in ceramics, and was an extraordinary cook. Looking back, I realize how creative the garments she made for me really were. She loved bold colour and always added unexpected details and personal touches. I remember a purple wool A-line dress she made with a hidden strip of bright orange fabric that flashed into view when I moved.

Do you have an artistic education?

I'm a graduate of The Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto, where I majored in textiles, specifically weaving.

Which influences shaped your work?

I grew up in a deeply artistic household. My father was an artist, and Toronto — one of the world's most multicultural cities — exposed me from an early age to a wide range of artistic and musical traditions.

Travel became a major source of inspiration.. In my early twenties, I spent time in the Middle East and Southern Europe. I still remember seeing a Bedouin dress for the first time and being struck by the intricacy of the embroidery, as well as the interiors of Bedouin tents lined with richly patterned woven textiles.

How does dance influence your pattern-making?

Dance also had a strong influence on my visual language. I studied dance and later international folk dance, especially from the Balkan regions, where the costumes and layered ornamentation deeply resonated with me. I think movement and choreography attuned my mind to complex patterning.

How do you translate movement into color and pattern on fabric?

When I create my work, I often experience colour and form physically, almost as movement within the body, which is one reason the process remains intuitive and spontaneous rather than strictly planned.

One of the challenges in my practice is combining this spontaneous way of working with the medium of textiles, which traditionally requires planning and painstaking precision. I work quickly, cutting and placing fabric pieces directly onto the surface, using scissors almost like a brush and fabric like paint.

Once the pieces are positioned, I pin them in place and gradually build up multiple layers. I then machine appliqué around each piece before repeating the process. The final stage is machine quilting, which brings the composition together structurally and visually.

How do you balance glitz with restraint in your textiles?

I also think carefully about balancing richness with restraint. Even when I use intense colour, shimmer, or highly active surfaces, I pay close attention to rhythm, spacing, and areas of rest within the composition. I'm drawn to abundance but not excess for its own sake. Through constant editing and adjustment, I try to create work that feels luminous and alive, while still grounded and balanced.

Why is the garden a symbol of unity in your art?

I was fascinated to learn that the word "garden" comes from the Persian idea of paradise - a walled space imagined as a complete little universe. That concept resonates strongly with my work. I think of each composition as a contained world built through colour, layering and relationships between many different elements.

What is a "textile garden" within a piece?

Only recently did I recognize the influence of my twenty-five-year career as a landscape designer. Many of my compositions can now be understood almost as garden layouts — layered environments built through rhythm, contrast, density, and balance. The viewer can meander through the piece, almost like a garden walk.

What does "simplicity through complexity" look like in practice?

For me, simplicity does not come from reduction, but from allowing many elements to settle into cohesion. My surfaces are built from hundreds of fragments, layers, and colour relationships, yet the goal is never visual noise. Over time, the complexity begins to resolve into something calm and unified.

I think of the work as a process of accumulation that eventually creates clarity. Individual fragments, stitches, and shifts in colour remain visible, but together they form a more complete and harmonious visual experience.

How do mandala-like structures guide the viewer's experience?

I was also influenced by my study of Tibetan Buddhism, particularly the immersive visual complexity of mandalas and temple interiors. While my work is not based on traditional mandala forms, I feel connected to their contemplative and immersive qualities. The layering, repetition, and gradual building of colour create a meditative rhythm within the work. I'm interested in how a textile surface can hold complexity while inviting sustained looking, allowing the viewer to enter the piece slowly over time.

How does beauty connect people in your work?

Beauty is central to my thinking. I believe beauty is a universal human language that can connect people across differences. Taste and preference may vary, but the underlying principles of beauty are deeply rooted. Few people question the beauty of nature itself.

In a time marked by division and constant conflict, I believe beauty has become more important, not less. I hope my work creates moments of connection, attention, and shared experience. As Dostoevsky wrote, "Beauty will save the world."