

**“At the Garden” Project**

Melissa Allegories

Broward County Cultural Division

Artist Support Grant

Cycle I

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## Shape the Culture You Want through the Stories You Tell

“Blood baths” were sacred! Once upon a time these great ideas were thought of as for the greater good, but the greater good meant different things throughout history. We need positive and impactful, secular messages for social cohesion.

Our beliefs are at the premises of our actions which are formed when we "assimilate" or make sense of our experiences, then "accommodate" or develop a new mental map. Our underlying beliefs are held in our subconscious mind which is a million times more powerful than our conscious mind through habit formation. Catch limiting beliefs and release and replace them, then reflect and reprogram (to continuously grow)! It is our inalienable right - as human beings – to cultivate the soil we share so that we all are given the chance to grow gracefully, thus share our different strengths of greatness (or brilliance) with one another with authenticity and harmony.

Melissa Hernandez, known by her alias Melissa Allegories, intricately weaves the art of storytelling with the use of *allegoría* (ἀλληγορία), a literary device known for its veiled and figurative language. In her creative studio and written works, she masterfully blends imagery with diverse artistic techniques to construct narratives that are both enchanting and enigmatic.

Within her gradually expanding body of work, known as “MelissAllegories,” she unifies a narrative art collection by merging and bridging visual/studio art with creative writing. This collection unfolds across five distinct realms within one interconnected world called, *Lében* (German for Life): “At the Garden,” “The Deep-Sea,” “Caged-City,” “Inside the Cave,” and “The Electric Forest.” Each realm introduces a unique setting with its own central characters, all intricately interwoven to convey a multitude of metaphors that collectively explore secular principles and values. “At the Garden” is at the forefront or takes precedence over the other worlds in *Lében*.

At its core, “MelissAllegories” is a profound exploration of themes such as personal growth, enlightenment, contemplation, discernment, the delicate balance between protection and power, the

art of decoding mysteries, and the embrace of ambiguity and the unknowable. Each composition within these settings gracefully incorporates a diverse hybrid cast of human-animals, mammals, and sea creatures.

This evolving narrative serves as a poignant testament to human values, where themes of hope shine brightly as a guiding beacon, inspiring us on a journey toward self-actualization and the flourishing of the human spirit.

### **Life Is What We Make It, so Let Us Make It WORTHWHILE**

Eudaimonia, a central concept in Aristotle's ethic, is often translated as "human flourishing." Contentment is a state of happiness and satisfaction (with a sense of belongingness through purposeful community engagements with social acceptance) which is what we all seek. Eudaimonia is achieved when we cultivate and nurture a variety of ultimate gardens/environments as within, so without or internally (within our psychological worlds) and externally (expressed in the concrete world) that allow for individual scaffolding within our zone of proximal development.

Failures can be crippling and detrimental to the ego, without a supportive figure. Failure is not the key to success or self-actualization, but continuous adaptation through strategizing with the knowledge to learn and the resources to improve. Life is what we make it, so let us make it worthwhile. We are not providing one another with a unique environment that allows each of us to self-actualize. Many of us remain at the bottom of the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid, struggling with survival while tasting merely bits and pieces of creativity and beauty; thus, falling back into a harsh grip on reality with despair.

Insufficient resource allocation or the cause of scarcity can cause unfriendly behaviors. Furthermore, since humans are innately tribal, most people are resistant to sharing wealth. Today's notable American philosopher and neuroscientist, Sam Harris, said, "In a world of true abundance you

should not have to work to justify your life, you should be free to enjoy the wealth of the world. If we are going to get to that place, we must change our ethics around that” (Pangburn, 2023).

Virtues (such as courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance) are also essential for living a flourishing life. According to Aristotle, the "golden mean" is about practicing these virtues by finding harmony between two extremes, like “inner engineering” (Offered by Sadhguru, 2023). With a hermetic view, the framework of each composition "At the Garden" focuses on a blooming theme that embodies personal growth and/or enlightenment through temperance: the practice of finding harmony within us/our character and manifesting "the greater good" in the concrete world with our actions. Natural science (e.g., astronomy) and geometric and harmonic principles have been studied and linked directly to the divine, since the time of medieval scholars and beyond.

### **Serving Humanity Through Human Ingenuity with the Storytelling Arts**

There are facts in fiction. Melissa Allegories uses real life experiences to compose visual and authored fictitious stories, ergo the journey has become a by-product! With a secular/humanistic focus, she introduces philosophical ideas through modern allegories and visual arts. Her creations may provoke thought and prompt viewers or audiences to engage in philosophical reflection. Melissa Allegories combines artistic expression, such as the visual arts and literature, as vehicles for philosophical exploration and communication. Often blurring the boundaries between art and philosophy, Melissa blends visual and textual elements to create a unique narrative or convey complex ideas.

She leverages the power of art and visual storytelling to engage with philosophical concepts, making them more accessible and thought-provoking for a broader audience. Using visuals as a powerful medium for storytelling and expression, Melissa employs allegories or a string of metaphors in a style reminiscent of medieval art to engage readers and provoke thought.

"At the Garden" promotes a deeper understanding of the connection between inner and outer worlds to enrich the lives of individuals and communities. "At the Garden" has the potential to benefit

society and communities by fostering self-reflection, ethical contemplation, and personal growth. By promoting the ideas of temperance, self-actualization, and the connection between inner and outer worlds, Melissa's artwork can inspire individuals to reflect on their own lives, strive for personal growth, and contribute positively to their communities. It encourages them to consider how their actions and attitudes impact the broader society.

### ***Artist Statement***

I have titled myself as an "artist-philosopher," because I have spent a lot of time thinking deeply about life. I enjoy gathering information/wisdom from others (e.g., like Sam Harris and Sadhguru), then finding ways to share it with the visual arts and the written word. It is a complicated task that has caused me to reassess my approach several times.

I love stories that feel empowering! I am motivated and inspired by these great ideas/stories and simple truths that are rewritten; as a result, they are passed down from generation to generation, to improve the quality of our lives. In my lifetime, these are things that I have absorbed and hope to portray in my visual artworks and creative writings.

A balanced and harmonious relationship with the natural world is essential for human flourishing in the concrete world. We are everything we are exposed to; we are reflections of the universe! We are everything we do and absorb, and our beliefs, ideas, and thoughts are the underlying premises of our actions. When individuals cultivate virtues like courage, wisdom, justice, and temperance, they are more likely to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives, contributing to their own well-being and the well-being of their communities. Character matters.

For instance, if hell is on earth, then heaven is our mental state of being. Heaven and hell are within us: as within, so without. If hell is on earth, then hell is within us. If heaven is within us, then there will be heaven on earth.

While our evolutionary history may have given rise to certain tribal instincts (such as our predisposition to form cliques), we share a common human desire for ethical and virtuous living. Although it is challenging, we can transcend these instincts through an ongoing commitment to personal and societal growth with conscious effort. As a result, moving away from our artistic temperaments, obsessions, and extremes of dark emotions; befriending our reptilian brains (which is territorial and aggressive, but it is responsible for our survival); and moving forward collectively as rational and emotionally intelligent beings.

As opposed to nature versus nurture, I think of it as an interaction between nature and nurture: a willingness and consensus between biological and environmental factors to sustain life! Eudaimonia or human flourishing is a holistic pursuit that requires attention to various dimensions of human life and well-being, such as material well-being, ethical character, social cohesion, psychological well-being, autonomy, and cultural considerations. "At the Garden" focuses on notions of temperance, harmony, enlightenment, self-actualization, and human flourishing are seen within different types of garden settings with allegorical depictions of domesticated horses and human-golden eagle hybrids (to represent aspects of human nature, such as the struggle for self-control), water and wine in two jugs (to illustrate the pursuit of inner harmony), flowers and tree houses (to symbolize stages of self-actualization), labyrinths (to demonstrate the journey of self-discovery) and so on.

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## Reference

Pangburn. (2023). *Do you TRUST your DISGUST ? Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Matt Dillahunty.*

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