



Lethe's Garden I, 2025
Collaged drawing, 22 x 30 inches
(Photo by John Janca)

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- Holly Wong

Offering a Pathway to Healing

with

Holly Wong



*San Francisco based artist Holly Wong
photographed by Christian Farrington*

Hello Holly, thank you for answering our questions today. Let's start with a few basics: how did you first become interested in art and when did you know that you wanted to "become" an artist?

Art became my language before I had words for what I was experiencing. Growing up in a family marked by violence and trauma, I found that making things with my hands offered a different kind of communication—one that could hold complexity and contradiction in ways that speaking couldn't. I remember being drawn to the physicality of materials, the way I could transform something broken into something whole through layering, cutting, and rebuilding. The decision to become an artist wasn't really a decision at all; it was more like recognizing that this was already how I was surviving and making sense of the world.

You just mentioned growing up surrounded by violence and trauma; in your practice, you explore healing and re-

silience. What does healing mean to you and can you tell us more about your practice?

Healing, for me, isn't about erasing scars or returning to some original state. It's about integration—finding ways to include our wounds in a larger story of wholeness. In my work, I literally practice this through collage and assemblage. I take fragments—memories, materials, marks—and find new relationships between them. The process mirrors how we can take the disparate parts of our experience and create something cohesive, something beautiful, even from what was once painful. I'm interested in what I call "radical repair"—not hiding the breaks, but making them part of the strength of the piece.

Your works are extremely intricate and at the same time explore a lot of different textures, materials, and techniques. I'm curious to know more about the process behind them and also about why you choose to work with different mediums such as fiber and collage, for example.

Each medium offers different possibilities for healing and transformation. Paint allows for fluidity and emotional expression, while collage lets me literally piece things back together. Fiber work connects me to generations of women who created beauty and meaning through textile practices. The LED light installations bring an ephemeral quality that speaks to spirit and transcendence.

My process is both intuitive and ritualistic. I begin by gathering—materials, memories, marks on paper. Then I respond to what the piece needs rather than imposing a predetermined vision. I often work in layers, building up surfaces that can hold multiple stories simultaneously.

“Each piece becomes a site of transformation where trauma can be metabolized into something that serves not just my healing, but hopefully offers a pathway for others as well.”

I read that there is also a feminist background to your work...

My work emerges from a lineage of women’s experiences—the violence we endure, but also our incredible capacity for survival and regeneration. I’m particularly interested in how women have historically used textile practices, pattern-making, and domestic crafts as sites of resistance and meaning-making. These practices were often dismissed as “women’s work,” but they carry profound knowledge about transformation and care.

Art can create space for conversations that are otherwise silenced. When I make visible the process of mending, of coming back together after being broken, I’m offering both witness and possibility. The work says: this happened, and also, healing is possible. Art can hold paradox in ways that linear narrative cannot—it can show us that we can be wounded and whole simultaneously.

Is there a piece or series you’d like to speak about more in detail?

I’d love to talk about my “Mnemosyne Rising” series, which was featured in my recent solo exhibition “Full Circle” at SLATE Contemporary Gallery. These collaged paintings reference the Greek goddess of memory, and they represent my practice of recalling traumatic memories and then consciously transforming them through art-making. In these works, I use oil paint, graphite, charcoal, and alcohol ink on canvas and paper, which I then hand-cut and adhere to shaped aluminum panels. The process is physically demanding—cutting, layering, adhering—and this physicality is essential. I incorporate plant imagery as metaphor for how healing can happen through time and the overgrowth of nature. These pieces are literally about mining my own memories and finding ways to repair what was broken, creating wholeness from fragments.

Next, I’d like to have a look behind the scenes—what have you been inspired by lately?

I’ve been deeply inspired by Greek mythology lately, particularly the myth of the Lethe river flowing through Hades—drinking from the river results in the forgetting of one’s past lives. I’m also drawn to the Greek titaness Mnemosyne, who personifies memory. These mythological figures help me relate to a broader and timeless narrative about memory, forgetting, and transformation. Greek mythology has inspired my work for a long time.



Lethe's Garden III, 2025
Collaged drawing, 30 x 22 inches (Photo by John Janca)

I'm also inspired by Korean ojagi textiles and their philosophy of mending and reuse, which aligns with my interest in radical repair.

And as we're reaching the end of our conversation, let's wrap up with a few last questions. First, what's one piece of advice you've learned throughout your career that you'd like to pass on to fellow artists?

Trust your materials and trust the process. The work often knows what it needs before you do. Be willing to follow the piece rather than forcing it to match your preconceptions.

"And remember that your lived experience—including the difficult parts—contains wisdom that the world needs."

When you are the viewer and not the author of an artwork, what is it that draws you towards a piece of art?

I'm drawn to work that has a physical presence—where I can sense the artist's hand and process. I love pieces that reveal their making, where materials are used in unexpected ways. I'm particularly attracted to work that holds contradiction, that can be both beautiful and difficult, tender and fierce.

Next, if there was only one thing that people could take away from your work, what would you want that to be?

That transformation is always possible. That our wounds can become sites of wisdom and beauty. That healing doesn't mean forgetting or erasing, but rather finding ways to integrate our experiences into a larger story of resilience and growth.

Please complete the following sentence: *I believe that art has the power to...*

Transform wounds into wisdom, create pathways for healing that didn't exist before, and remind us that we are capable of rebuilding ourselves and our communities with beauty and intention, no matter what we've endured.

And last one, is there anything you're currently working on that you'd like to share with us? Or any recent or upcoming exhibitions you'd like to give a shout?

I'm thrilled to share that I'll be installing a large fiber installation titled "Guardian of the Spirits" alongside a collage painting, "Lamp of Memory," as part of the group exhibition "Perfectly Lost" at Walker Fine Art Gallery in Denver, CO. The opening is November 14, 2025 with an artist talk the following day. Full details are available at www.walkerfineart.com.

I'm also excited to announce my upcoming solo exhibition, "Ascension," at the Rosemary Duffy Larson Gallery at Broward College in Davie, Florida, opening February 19, 2026. I'm looking forward to collaborating with curator Bridgette Mayer on the selection and design—it's a wonderful opportunity to work with both immersive installations and two-dimensional pieces in such a beautiful space.

*Get in touch with Holly: www.hollywongart.com
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Elixir V & VI, 2025
Collaged paintings and drawings on shaped aluminum dibond, 48 x 80 inches each
(Photos by John Janca)



*Up: Body of Light, Overview, 2023, Fabric & LED light, 180 x 132 x 84 inches (Photo by John Janca)
Down: Deconstructed Quilt (I & II), 2022, Fabric & LED light, 60 x 60 x 18 inches each (Photos by Wes Magyar)*



Guardian of the Spirits, 2022 (general view & close up)
Fabric & cellophane, 264 x 144 x 48 inches
(Photos by Cam McLeod)