



## **Melissa Stephens**

I come from a long line of skilled storytellers, and this tradition plays a role in my paintings. My desire to share a story goes beyond telling a tale - I want to capture someone's full attention and lead them through an experience beyond their own. When the spoken word isn't enough, I head to my studio.

Undeterred by language barriers or ideas that challenge my belief system, I will begin a new series because a concept or story resonates with me, and I simply cannot forget what has been experienced or communicated.

Although my artwork often reflects my own journey, there are times when I explore traditions that are not my own. In 2016, I heard a story told by Director, Lulu Wang, on "This American Life," about a Chinese tradition called Chongxi. The literal meaning is to "wash away misfortune with joy;" Unable to stop thinking about it, I got busy painting instead. I also have a series based on the Japanese tradition of Kintsugi, the art of repairing broken pottery with precious metals, which I use as a metaphor for how people reveal their internal, psychological or physical scars.

Encaustic paint is the perfect medium because this process has its own story to tell. It has all the elements of a good story: luminous layers, texture, imagery that gives pause and dramatic cuts. Like a good story, my art is never truly complete until it has been shared. I love to educate my viewers about this art form while discovering how my visual interpretations and stories connect with others.