

The Tale of *Spring Apron*

The tale of Spring Apron starts in the woods, moves into the studio, has false starts and true completions. Ultimately, out of the request for one piece to be included in Domestic Matters: The Uncommon Apron, three pieces were born. Missy Stevens, 2019

The outdoors, like my home, is a place I go to relax and refuel. Spring is a much anticipated season. The return of green lifts my heart after the long period of brown, grey and white that is a New England winter. There's a sequence of early spring markers that I look forward to. It starts with the blooming of the snow drops, then snow crocuses, and the smell of spring in the air. Soon after comes the return of the phoebes, more bird song and the wood frogs' joyful racket accompanied by the peepers peeping.

A bit later in spring ferns emerge and unfurl. It is a daily slow motion performance as each frond dances, finding curlicue shapes then opening to a graceful arch. I'd love a time-lapse film of this process*. Many years ago I made several small pieces inspired by the ferns emerging and the gestures they struck in that process. A couple of these pieces were never completed and were tucked away in my cupboard.

When I was invited to participate in *Domestic Matters: The Uncommon Apron* ferns were not on my mind. I knew immediately what I would contribute. I had a small celestial apron decorated with a star map*, already completed years before. I'd always intended to make a figure to wear it. I trusted that this show's deadline would give me the impetus I needed to actually make it. I looked and looked and looked for the little apron, and couldn't find it. What I did find was the two unfinished fern pieces that offered themselves to become an apron.

Like ferns, almost all of the materials in *Spring Apron* have had long dormancies before emerging in this union. The fern embroideries were at least 20 years old, the fragments of lace were from well-worn garments of the late 1800s. The tatting was made over 100 years ago by my Great Aunt Alice; it has lain in my materials bin for at least 30 years. It helps that I am an unapologetic keeper of scraps, never knowing when they could fit perfectly in some as yet unknown piece!

Spring is a favorite subject for my work, followed closely by summer. I feel so much joy when spring arrives, I truly want to slow things down, so that I can absorb and savor every bit of this delicious season. Making something about the season helps me slow it down. *Spring Apron* is a ceremonial garment to be used when calling forth Spring, the spirit of Spring, or a Spring-like state of mind. Simply rest your eyes on it, and let your body and memory call in Spring. It also speaks to me of the experience of transition, the grace of the ephemeral, the continuity of our connections, the momentary states of being we all pass through as nature works on us. And, of course, the beauty of ferns.

As summer follows spring, so *Summer Apron* wheedled it's way into being. It is made with glorious, persuasive, vintage glass beads and celebrates the bloomingness of the season. Then, perhaps because the Goddess of the Apron witnessed my dedication to her, I found the celestial apron!

I set to work, looking for the being who would wear this long sought star map apron. The character who emerged is *Mr. E, Star Farmer*. The first thing *Mr. E* needed as he began to take shape was a head. I had made some heads from clay, but none of them seemed to fit this as yet uncreated character. There are many things around in my studio and my eyes settled on one of those things. My dear friend Xuni Requiem had drawn with colors on a horse vertebra and sent it to me years ago for a possible collaboration. She has since passed on, but I knew this vertebra would make a fine head all the more so because it is infused with her spirit. A certain amount of my making has to do with being open to seeing what surrounds me and to listening to the animate nature of materials. And not thinking I know what's going to happen!

And so it went. Out of one request, many pieces!

*Links for fern unfurling video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-CS1w8Z-js>

Star maps can be created here

<http://www.fourmilab.ch/cgi-bin/uncgi/Yoursky>



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Summer Apron



Mr. E, Star Farmer