



## KATHLEEN ELLIOT

Micaëla Gallery  
49 Geary Street  
No. 234  
San Francisco, CA 94108 USA

T +1.415.551.8118  
[info@micaela.com](mailto:info@micaela.com)

[micaela.com/elliott.html](http://micaela.com/elliott.html)

## KATHLEEN ELLIOT

Born in Akron, Ohio, in 1958, glass artist Kathleen Elliot has made California her home for 47 years. With her husband's encouragement and support, she discovered and developed her artistic talent while raising their five children.

In the 1980's, she expressed her creativity as a hair stylist and make-up artist with a cosmetology degree from San Jose City College.

From 1985 to the present, Kathleen steadily pursued her education in linguistics, philosophy and biology, communication, leadership and management, organizational development, the design of business offers, and most recently the arts. With this educational background, she built a 14-year career in designing and managing adult education programs, organizational development and training for various corporations.

Kathleen's interest in glass art began in 1996 when a friend introduced her to flame working. She taught herself the art of bead making by studying how artists made beads in the photos in glass art books and then experimenting. Kathleen took her first glassblowing class in 1996 at San Jose State University, and continued to grow her passion and talent for art glass jewelry.

The first year of the new century was a turning point in Kathleen's life: she chose to pursue her art in earnest, leaving her prior career. She studied at De Anza College and attended Pilchuck Glass School for three summers, studying with Laura Donefer, Robert Mickelsen, and Shane Fero.

After her study with Mr. Fero in 2003, Kathleen shifted from glass bead making to her "Botanica" sculptures, which she now shows in galleries throughout the U.S. She is currently working on two bodies of work, both in a botanical vocabulary. One is a series of natural botanical sculpture and the other, imaginary botanical forms.

## STATEMENT

Our American culture is "crazy". We live in a rush of busyness, hurry, trying to get ahead, achieving the American Dream of being rich and beautiful with perfect children. We are surrounded by advances in technology in every field, with more and more mass-produced and machine-produced products; Hollywood is in our faces every day hyping its surgically altered fantasy of movie stars and the dream of perfection; the fashion industry assails us with its version of what's sexy now; marketing bombards us everywhere we turn.

This milieu produces flatness and dullness, a lack of humanity, creativity and individuality that can seep into our marriages, families, health, and careers. People can forget their own humanity, lose forgiveness and appreciation for themselves and others, lose sight of the opportunities we have to be creative with our own lives.

Art returns us to a mood of wonder and appreciation, helps us stay centered in the face of our culture. Its beauty, strength and clarity can be inspiration for us in our own lives. Art reminds us of human virtues and the wonders of Nature. Its richness and depth can inspire us to rise above the mediocrity of drifting in the cultural norm.

My own art is inspired by such wonders as the delicacy of flower petals, the patterns of veins in leaves, the sweet golden color of my children's sleepy faces when they awake in the morning, the shiny blackness of crows, the rich smell of the forest floor, changing colors of autumn leaves, seed pods and acorns – a hundred intricate and intimate moments in a day that can take my breath away if I remember to stop, listen, look around.

The purpose of my art is to inspire and remind myself and others that we can be amazed by even the most simple things in life. Allow your breath to be taken away by the beauty of a leaf, allow the intricacy of a flower to remind you of the awesome gift of life, be soothed by the shape of an acorn and the smoothness of its skin, be stunned by the delicate work of art that is a bird's nest. We are surrounded by astonishing wonders every day. My art reminds us to notice, appreciate and be grateful for them ... and be surprised at what they are and are not.

My art reminds us, no matter what we do or what our work is, let us live our lives artfully!

## **ESSAY**

Thus far I have composed my art in a botanical vocabulary. My love of botanical life is currently feeding two bodies of work. The first is a series of fairly representational botanical sculptures. The second is a series of imaginary botanical forms.

These two bodies of work hold a great deal of meaning for me. They allow me to explore and express ideas I have been engaged in most of my life – my life-long love of plant life, and over 20 years of study in philosophy and spirituality.

These disciplines converge into inquiries about “What is a ‘good life’?” “What really matters in life?” “What do we believe and how do we believe?” and “What is real, and how do we know?” These themes play out in my art through the expression and manipulation of botanical forms.

### ***What is a “good” life?***

The first body of work, which is where I started, is a series of natural-appearing botanical sculptures. Since I was a child, I have loved plants, trees, leaves, flowers, branches, seeds and seedpods, the varieties and cycles of botanical life. I find infinite variety and infinite fascination in the details of plants. When I slow down and look at them and appreciate them, I have a visceral, emotional reaction that I think of as spiritual.

I experience the same feeling when I read about the intricacies of the human body or the vastness of the universe. These experiences remind me that life is an incredible mystery we humans will perhaps never understand – and that gives me a beautiful sense of joy and relief, of gratitude and appreciation for the life I get to live, a sense of wonder and aliveness. This is when I know “God”.

For me, God is not someone defined. God is the opening or the possibility in which we get to live and build our lives, with the amazing variety of elements and creatures and happenings and people and possibilities that exist or can exist in the opening that life is. Being amidst Nature, especially botanical life, reminds me of all this.

Botanical life simply is, with no regard for or connection with human intention. It was here before humans were, and it will live after we are gone. There is something spiritual about leaning on a tree that is older than I am, looking up into its branches and leaves, knowing it will remain after I die. I never tire of plants. They never fail to amaze me. Making botanically-based art is simply a natural expression of my Self.

### ***What really matters in life?***

My studies in philosophy have framed my experience with Nature at a deeper level and have led to my conviction that human beings need Nature - especially in our Western, fast-paced, media-driven, technological culture.

When in Nature, we slow down, we attune to a different rhythm, we ease away from the push and pull of the messages of television and media and technology in our culture. We return to ourselves on a more fundamental level. We gain more space, more quiet, more capacity to notice life around us, to

breathe deeply, to smell and to hear more richly. These are poignant moments, when human beings stop, reflect, listen and look quietly. These are important moments in which human beings can experience spirituality, a connection with the rest of the world and a return to our Selves.

Nature reminds us that we, too, are part of Nature. Nature reminds us that we are not machines, we are not computers, we are human beings. Biologically, what distinguishes human beings from all others is our capacity for language. Our capacity for language enables us to build lives, to build meaning in life, and to care. Humanity is that capacity to build meaning in life and to care.

Being in Nature reminds us of our humanity. Human beings need these respites in Nature in order to stop and think about what we are doing with our lives. Nature softens what television and media have hardened in us and enables us to reflect on whether we are living the lives we would really choose.

***What is real, and how do we know? What do we believe and how do we believe?***

My second body of work encompasses a wide array of imaginary botanical forms.

My imaginary botanicals were initially inspired by reading the writing of, and encounters with, author and anthropologist Carlos Castaneda, coupled with my studies in philosophy. One of the primary inquiries of philosophy is “what is real and how do we know?” Castaneda was on a similar quest, albeit from quite a different direction – he pursued the knowledge of the Yaqui Indian sorcerer Don Juan. A central thread of the Yaqui sorcerers’ tradition was the notion that our reality is a social construct held intact by shared belief, and that there are alternate realities people can access through rigorous spiritual, mental and physical discipline.

Setting aside whether or not I “believe” Castaneda’s teachings, some of these notions connect with my studies in philosophy. Castaneda’s teachings spurred me to move outside of the constraints of naturalistically representing botanical life and to explore my imagination of what botanical life might be like in alternate realities. My imaginary botanicals have come to serve as a reminder that what we experience as “reality” can be re-interpreted and reinvented, allowing new opportunities that were not present before and a renewed sense of wonder and curiosity.

These imaginary botanical forms continue to evolve and express other ideas as I delve deeper with them. Sometimes they convey exaggerated aspects of natural botanical life; sometimes they portray human or animal characteristics, such as actions or intentions or sexuality; and sometimes they address social issues such as diversity and the need for tolerance.

On a basic level, these imaginary botanical sculptures are also an opportunity for me to have fun - to explore and play with the materials, with colors and forms, to express moods, feelings and emotions. My natural tendency is to be contained, lacking confidence, and shy, and this body of work gives me the opportunity to shake out of that mode into a more playful, expressive style. My exploration with this body of work has become a means for me to build trust in my imagination, intuition and creativity.

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