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“I spend a lot of time thinking about balance: the visual balance required for successful art, the elusive balance of creativity and survival, and the delicate balance between making things that are simultaneously beautiful and meaningful. Besides the subliminal influence of a childhood spent sewing, a pedigree of garment workers, and years spent as a textile designer, my current source of inspiration draws from the ceremonial feather art of the Amazon Basin.

Despite the thousands of feathers I have created while developing my Plumage Series, I have to confess, I am not a bird watcher. Rather, I am a lover of West African masks and other indigenous art. It is the ragged beauty of these objects and the use of commonplace fibers that have mesmerized me with their embodiment of the possibility that art making can be both sensible and sacred. These objects inspire me to make art that is more intuitive and less intellectual. Like my Amazonian mentors, I am attempting to shift the narrative from the private

musings of the artist, to the wordless conversation between the materials, and ultimately into the public dialogue.

I am curious about transforming the fluid and sensuous materials of wax and fiber into work that is neither traditional fiber art nor painting. By pushing these materials towards each other and away from their usual applications, I am able to morph them into new forms that feel original and authentic. Echoing the ceremonial tribal pieces, I have tried to evoke feathers by using a complex nine-step process incorporating an array of distinctly un-feathery materials.

I begin by choosing printed fabrics that will emerge from, but not dominate, the finished piece. Working with encaustic

“Plumage 6”

photography by
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.



*“Rapture 5”
(detail on next page)*

paint mixed by hand, and using beeswax, dry pigment, and resin, I paint layers and layers of marks on the fabric. Next, I stiffen the back of the fabric with GAC 400 for textiles by Golden®, followed by two coats of GAC 500 for an even stiffer, more leathery foundation. After stiffening, I cut the work into strips that are the length of the future feathers.

Returning to the front, I make more marks with oil paint sticks. Although these layers begin to obscure the original print, I still feel like I am collaborating with its energy and color. After I cut out the feathers, I paint the edges with either colored encaustic or gold paint. It never fails to amaze me how varying the paint on the edges completely alters

the appearance of the feathers, yielding a visual cornucopia of color, despite the limited number of fabrics I use.

Once I have a palette of hundreds of feathers, which can take several weeks or months, I begin to build pieces. I build in layers, working from the bottom to the top, much like the feathers of the raptors that inspire my titles. From a

distance, the work reads like feathers, but at close range one can see that they are made from fabric, encaustic, waxed linen thread, and wire. Finally, I choose a stick, wrap it with fabric, and sew the stick onto the top of the piece with waxed linen thread. This dowel provides framework and structure to the piece and acts as an anchor when the piece is displayed on the wall.

The more sculptural pieces require larger components, and the encaustic feathers take on a larger scale that poses new technical challenges. Instead of sewing the feathers onto a fabric background, I now use staples as a way to 'stitch' the feathers onto a sturdier structure.

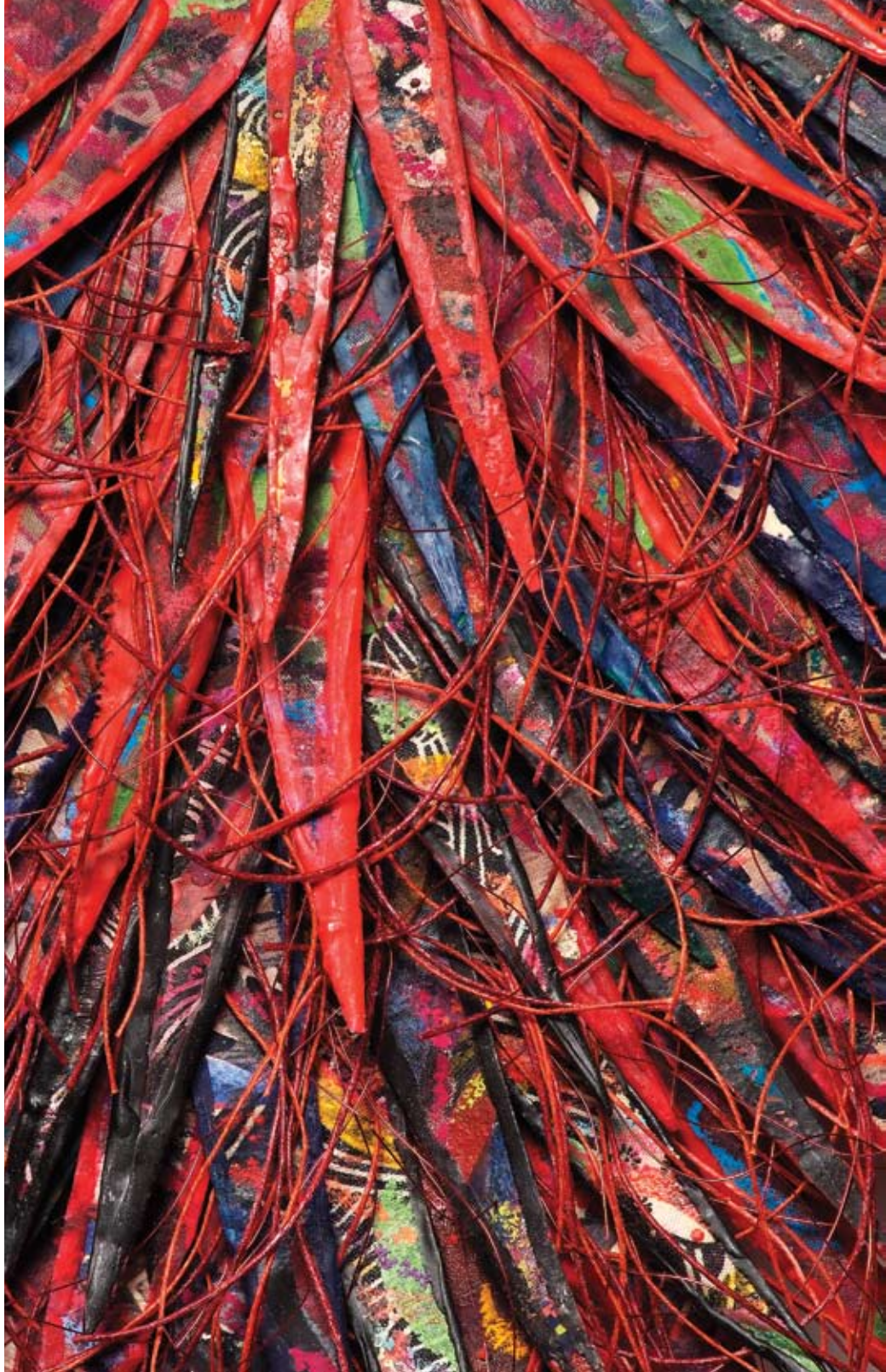
In order to translate the feathers into a more durable form appropriate for public art commissions, I have begun working with Ditto Editions of Salem, Massachusetts, to reproduce the feathers using an inkjet process on an aluminum background.

My non-artist friends are perplexed by the elaborate methods described above, but I think other fiber artists join me in finding time-consuming processes


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soothing and meditative. The repetition offers me many hours to dream about living in a culture where there is a healthier equilibrium between survival and creativity, and where making art is central to daily life. The ensuing pieces are indigenous to my inner homeland,

a place of solitude, speculation, and passion. 

To see more of Deborah's work, visit deborahkruger.com.