



Marissa Alexander, in flower covered waters (detail), Handbuilt white stoneware and glazes, 2020. Collection of the Artist.

Marissa Alexander

Marissa Y Alexander is an artist currently living and working in Hamilton ON. She builds with clay to make both functional and sculptural ceramic objects. She is very interested in the process of discovering form through coil building and establishing alluring surfaces, creating pattern and narrative to visually describe her vision - vision as something of great beauty - vision as envisioning contemporary life. Marissa received her MFA in Ceramic Art from Alfred University in 2019 and was previously a full-time Artist-In-Residence at Harbourfront Centre. She has a BA in Sociology from McMaster University and an Advanced Diploma in Craft and Design (Ceramics) from Sheridan College.



Marissa Alexander, i dreamt i swam with you (detail), Handbuilt white stoneware and glazes, 2020. Collection of the Artist.

Cover Image: Marissa Alexander, i dreamt i swam with you (detail), Handbuilt white stoneware and glazes, 2020. Collection of the Artist.

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swim with me: Marissa Alexander





Marissa Alexander, *i dreamt i swam with you (detail)*, Handbuilt white stoneware and glazes, 2020. Collection of the Artist.



Marissa Alexander, *warmed by the sun*, Handbuilt white stoneware and glazes, 2020. Collection of the Artist.

Marissa Alexander, *i dreamt i swam with you (detail)*, Handbuilt white stoneware and glazes, 2020. Collection of the Artist.



swim with me: Marissa Alexander

In the midst of uncertainty and constant change, we are often drawn to the memories and places that make us feel at ease. In Marissa Alexander's most recent body of work, *swim with me*, we become immersed in the cool waters and bright patterns of intricately decorated pots that bring us back to summer days spent in rivers and lakes. Finding calmness and an understanding that change is inevitable in the waters of her memories, Alexander has brought these sensations to her decorated, organic vessels.

Alexander's practice often begins with coil-built forms, a method that allows her to slowly build a piece using layers of ceramic coils that create vessels without restrictions. In layering coil upon coil, those lines build forms. As they grow, these forms develop edges, defining her vessel's surface to be decorated in another layering of lines and boundaries. The vessels slowly expand and contract, rippling and flowing in a way that evokes not only the

themes of water that she wishes to convey, but also the interaction between coil and line that are at the core of her forms. In *swim with me*, however, the vessels lose some element of definition in the ways in which her patterns flow without borders around all sides. Figures and patterns drift and glide throughout the spaces Alexander has created as we ourselves are drawn into these limitless pools of cool blue water. Each piece has no front or reverse, no beginning or end, as the water and figures flow from one surface to another.

A return to larger vessels for Alexander, the *swim with me* works provided her with a reminder to go with the flow in our ever-changing world and in the organic development of her vessels as they became expansive areas for happy and serene imagery. Going with the flow, Marissa Alexander drew energy from her expanded opportunities, producing stunning works rich in patterns and detail. In *i dreamt i swam with you*, numerous female figures swim and glide gracefully around the vessel. Exploring her passion for beauty and fashion, the figures wear hairstyles and decorated bathing suits that become extensions of the artist herself and demonstrate her knowledge of aesthetics and decorative abilities. With a sense of whimsy and a nod to pop culture, the female figures wade in the waters without care, an almost contagious imagery that soothes the viewer.

The other two works in this series, *in flower covered waters* and *warmed by the sun*, leave behind the swimming figures for a more abstractly decorated approach. Water lilies dance across their surfaces, in contrasting blue and orange waters that flow across the clay of *in flower covered waters* and ripple through *warmed by the sun*. In each of these works, the feeling of being around waters remains; in one, the flowing waters of a river or lake, and in the other, a still surface disturbed by ripples that reflect a warm orange glow as if sunning on the beach. Alexander's patterns once again circle around each vessel, producing a viewing experience without beginning or end as the patterns and the waters they represent flow from one view to the next.

For myself, these works draw to mind memories of weekends spent on Georgian Bay with family and care-free summers of years gone by spent at beaches and pool sides with friends. Despite the bizarre experiences of these past months as nothing feels quite normal, it is memories such as these that provide respite, yet also a longing for a return to the familiar. In Alexander's vessels, we are able to find at least some experience—if even just a memory—of that calmness and familiarity. Circling and exploring these pots with our eyes, our imaginations and memories flow just like the waters they represent. The narratives that have been carefully painted by Alexander merge and blend with our own in an experience of tranquility and change that is both hers and ours.

Peter Flannery
Assistant Curator