



Yolanda Sánchez: A Surprising Path to Painting

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by Elisa Turner

Late in the afternoon on a recent October day, Yolanda Sánchez checked into her Manhattan hotel after flying from Miami to New York and rushed to the nearby Museum of Arts and Design, determined to get there before it closed. MAD is one of her favorite destinations in New York City.

We spoke by phone the following morning. The artist was excited about the opening that night of “Along the Road of Dreams” at Kathryn Markel Fine Arts in Chelsea. On view through November 26, 2016, it’s her fifth solo show with [Kathryn Markel Fine Arts](#) in New York City. Additional paintings can be easily seen in the window (and inside) their gallery in Bridgehampton in The Hamptons.

But first we had to talk about [MAD](#).

From the almost breathless way she spoke about seeing MAD’s exhibit of fiber art by [Françoise Grossen](#), as well as “[Crochet Coral Reef](#)” by sisters Margaret and Christine Wertheim, Sánchez clearly has a passionate history with textile arts.

Surprising for a painter? Perhaps not, but her own path to painting has taken novel twists and turns.

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“Unspoken Thoughts” by Yolanda Sánchez, 2016. Oil on canvas (triptych), 41 X 81 inches.
Courtesy Kathryn Markel Fine Arts.

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Grossen’s large-scale rope sculptures from the 1960s and 1970s, when fiber was not considered “serious” material for producing fine art, were revolutionary for the time. Seeing Grossen’s art now “really brought me back to doing macramé in the 1970s,” she said during our phone interview on October 20, 2016.

Sánchez’s own fascination with innumerable textures of textiles, from coarse to silken, shaped her creative world view even before she considered herself an artist. As a teenager in the late 1960s, Sánchez loved sewing classes in high school. “I made my own clothes,” she remembered proudly. A feeling for fabric seeped early into her artistic psyche.

Today, the energy of youthful creative experiences manifests itself in her abstract paintings, with their swooping strokes of color that seem to dance across the canvas. Certainly, the luscious and

refined diptych, *Amorous Pursuit*, evokes the swaying, tender motion of a *pas de deux*. Another diptych, *Things I Wish for in this World*, thrills the eye with a multitude of brilliant, interlaced strokes of yellow. Yes, it's an abstraction, but it conveys the exuberance of a jubilantly choreographed *grand finale*.



"Amorous Pursuit" by Yolanda Sánchez, 2016. Oil on canvas, (diptych)
45 x 64 inches. Courtesy Kathryn Markel Fine Arts.



"Things I Wish for in this World" by Yolanda Sánchez, 2016. Oil on canvas (diptych), 60 x 72 inches. Courtesy Kathryn Markel Fine Arts.

As a very young girl in her native Cuba, Sánchez studied ballet, later resuming her studies after moving to Miami with her family. In late adolescence, the rigors of ballet proved too much, but as an adult Sanchez took classes in jazz, modern, and street dance.

"I still wish I were dancing," she mused in our phone interview. "I have always had this fantasy of studying flamenco," she laughed.

Given all that this Miami Beach-based artist has accomplished, clicking her heels as a flamenco dancer hardly seems a fantasy.

Before she fully identified herself as a visual artist, there was an impressive detour. In 1979, Sanchez earned a PhD in Clinical Psychology. She made her living as a clinical psychologist before studying art. An illness in the early 1980s forced her to slow down and reconsider her priorities.

"I loved what I did, but I always had this urge to create and learn more," she recalled. She took classes in drawing and painting: clearly the right move. "Oh my goodness, it was like I was in heaven," she laughed. "I found myself, and I was so happy."



"Return to Grace" by Yolanda Sánchez, 2016. Oil on canvas, 41 x 29 1/2 inches. Courtesy Kathryn Markel Fine Arts.

Fast forward to 1991, when she received a BFA from Florida International University. Three years later she was awarded an MFA in Painting from Yale University School of Art. From 1994 to 1995, she was a Fulbright Scholar in Spain.

A vivacious woman whose often casual manner belies a life of laser-like focus and international cultural and academic pursuits, Sánchez finds time to make art while holding down a day job that's provided many opportunities for other artists. Since 1995, she's managed the Fine Arts and Cultural Affairs Division of the Miami-Dade Aviation Department and [Miami International Airport's innovative art program](#).

As if that's not enough, she's a licensed clinical psychologist in the State of Florida and founded the Miami chapter of [A Home Within](#), a national organization providing pro bono psychotherapy for foster youth.

Meanwhile, in the last 15 years, she's exhibited her paintings and textile art in dozens of venues in the United States as well as in Rome, Barbados and South Korea. Her art belongs to various private and public collections including Neiman Marcus; J. Crew; NSU Museum of Art in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; Museum of Contemporary Art in Jacksonville, Florida; and Chojun Textile and Quilt Museum in Seoul, South Korea, according to her [website](#).



"Echoing Green" by Yolanda Sánchez, 2016. Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches.
Courtesy Kathryn Markel Fine Arts.

A feeling for fabric, as well as form and color, has been a sustaining force as she navigates her own psychological challenges.

Around five years ago, she recovered her physical "motor memory" of those long ago sewing classes. Her mother had recently died, and she searched for a new creative outlet to deal with her grief. Fond of Asian culture, she took a textile class in the centuries-old Korean craft form Bojagi.

When she walked into the class, she recalled thinking, "My goodness, do I still know how to use a sewing machine? But, you know, it comes back," she laughed. Sewing led to another adventure for this artist who adores travel and new challenges.

Steeped in Korean traditions and created by anonymous artisans, Bojagi began as a craft form made with fabric. Thought to ensure good fortune, it exemplified the "marriage of utility and beauty," according to the [Korea Bojagi Forum website](#). Humble versions were used to wrap wedding gifts. Royal families collected more elaborate examples, embellished with weaving and embroidery.

In our own era, Bojagi has been modified and celebrated by artists for its expressive color and texture. Sánchez immediately responded to this Asian melding of craft and fine art. Encouraged by her teacher, she sent work to the 2011 "Bojagi International Exhibition" at San Francisco's [Craft and](#)

[Folk Art Museum](#), according to Sánchez .

She later participated in the Suwon Hwaseong International Theatre and Arts Festival in Seoul, South Korea, which took place in the dramatic [Hwaseong Fortress](#). It's a UNESCO site, hailed for mixing Eastern and Western architectural styles. In a similar vein, Sánchez's take on Bojagi echoes this mixing.

For this festival, her painter's background prevailed: She created seven rectangular banners, which fluttered gracefully from a bridge over a grassy river below. There was an abstract overlay of delicious color and bold geometric forms. As her website explains, the geometric compositions echoed both the Modernist aesthetic of traditional Bojagi patchwork as well as paintings by Mondrian and stained glass windows by Frank Lloyd Wright.

Sánchez's Bojagi banners, [visible on the artist's website](#), often suggest paintings veiled with translucent swathes of color. Her current exhibition at Kathryn Markel Fine Art reveals the artist's compelling fusion of the visual arts with other art forms.

Along the Road of Dreams, for example, is a triptych marked with loops and arabesques of blue, punctuated with vibrant splashes of pink and yellow. There's an emphatic, graceful sense of rhythm to this painting.

It holds a tantalizing promise. Perhaps one day Sánchez will pursue yet another colorful art form: swirling in space as a Flamenco dancer.



"Along the Road of Dreams" by Yolanda Sánchez, 2016. Oil on canvas (triptych), 72 x 72 inches. Courtesy Kathryn Markel Fine Arts.

BASIC FACTS: Yolanda Sánchez is represented by Kathryn Markel Fine Arts in New York City and Bridgehampton, N.Y. Click [here](#) to see a selection of her paintings. "Yolanda Sánchez: Along the Road of Dreams" is on view through November 26, 2016 at Kathryn Markel Fine Arts, 529 West 20th Street, Suite 6W, New York, NY 10011. www.markelfinearts.com.

Yolanda Sánchez is based in Miami Beach. Click [here](#) to visit her website.

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