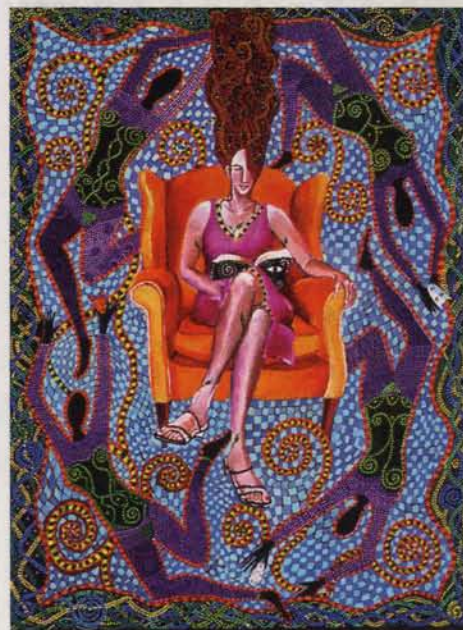


## Danielle Mailer



Danielle Mailer's "Holding Back the Night" (above), is the cover art for a CD by dulcimer player and Connecticut State Troubador Thomasina Levy. "Tattooed Madonnas" (top right), is a two-dimensional mixed-media collage of silhouettes painted on and cut out of Masonite. "Goddess of Small Things" (bottom right), is an acrylic painting on canvas.



In the brittle, brutal and ultimately bewitching drama that was Danielle Mailer's childhood, the artichoke loomed like a decadent elixir. Nettlesome, prickly and maniacally self-protective, the artichoke was the vegetable of last resort, the Latin lozenge of her crazed girlhood. Mailer, 50, a Cornwall artist prone to fits of sensuous color, recalls sitting with her brooding mother as she plucked leaf after prickly artichoke leaf, lapping the buttery innards with her tongue and scraping the meaty interior with her teeth.

This is what it took to get to the heart of things.

Artichokes, dice, skulls, peppers, leopards, eyes and bones are part of the whimsical Mailer iconography. They are tattooed onto the soaring Matisse-like silhouettes that slither through her shimmering, vivid landscapes. Mailer, who has exhibited throughout Litchfield County and at her own eponymous gallery in Goshen, creates a kind of "female spiritual landscape," where dynamic dryads are tattooed with her singular symbolism.

The daughter of author Norman Mailer and the Peruvian abstract artist Adele Morales Mailer, she can't help but infuse her work with

motifs that are personal and archetypal. Black, tadpolelike female figures soar, arc, flit and fly through a world pulsing with bubblegum pinks and Creamsicle oranges, limey greens and honeyed yellows. Peppers are at once the blood-red reminders of a fiery Latin heritage and ornamental glyphs that flicker through the margins of her canvases like Christmas lights.

"I am trying to create that unencumbered spirit," says Mailer, who is also chairwoman of the art department at Lakeville's Indian Mountain School. "In my own life, I don't always feel that exuberant. I'm a parent, I'm a wife, I have a day job. So when I get into my studio, I experience the flip side of that yearning. I can actualize that wish."

Tall, raven-haired, long and lithe as her ebullient female figures, Mailer was 5 when her parents divorced. It was her mother whom Mailer impaled with a two-and-a-half-inch pen-knife blade to the belly in a notorious 1962 brawl that sent her to intensive care and Norman Mailer to Bellevue. Mailer would like to sidestep the incident and the attendant drama that ran through the rest of her life, but the effort is fruitless. Instead, the talismans of her childhood—dice,



birds, bones, a knife—filter through her mandala-like canvases like uninvited snapshots from a recurring dream. The abdomen, the slender and slippery orb that figures so prominently in her work, is at once vulnerable and vigorous. Mailer punctures it with artichokes, bones and plum-colored vessels, pouring out droplets of confettilike blood. “The torso is so much a part of the female geography,” she says. “That’s where women hold their emotions. That’s where I have my anxiety, my focus, my nervousness. It’s also the center of life-giving force.”

Mailer, who is married and has three children, grew up in New York, spending the weekends with her father and one of his five subsequent wives. Her mother was a recovered



Danielle Mailer in her studio.

alcoholic, an eccentric prone to fits of anger and depression as well as wild humor and ferocious affection. Mailer was dyslexic and didn’t learn to read comfortably until she was 11, a source of deep frustration to her literary lion father, who insisted on feeding her reading assignments. She attended the New York School of Art and Music and Bowdoin College.

Mailer’s work is enigmatically narrative, and the titles of most of her paintings are drawn from short stories or other literary references. She listens to books on tape while she paints, which may explain her use of characters floating gracefully through the miasma of memory. She is partial to Latin writers like Isabel Allende and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who write with the magical realism her own work incarnates.

Girlish, warm and complaisant, Mailer says she was blessed with a pliant, cheerful temperament that has earned her the family sobriquet “hummingbird” for her peacemaking proclivities.

“It’s a temperament that you’re born with. And maybe it’s a survival technique for living with a jungle of evil stepmothers. I have learned that it’s a way to navigate.”

To see more of Danielle Mailer’s work, visit her studio: The Danielle Mailer Gallery, 331 Goshen-Sharon Tpke. (Route 4), Goshen. For hours or to make an appointment, call (860) 480-1392, visit [daniellemailer.com](http://daniellemailer.com) or contact the artist at [danielle@daniellemailer.com](mailto:danielle@daniellemailer.com).

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