



Shelley Novotny

NORTHWOODS

by Dan Hagen



Shelley Novotny, a Shakti artist from Northwoods Wisconsin, is deeply attuned to nature and possesses a fervor for eco-friendly, mixed media, and recycled art. She crafts one of a kind handcrafted wearable art ensembles and headdresses to adorn and empower women. She will tell you her most recent accomplishment has been bringing to fruition, "The Artistic Alchemists". This is a local group of diversely talented creatives who are energetically aligned, pulling their divine natural gifts, creative skills, and energies together. Looking through Shelley's headdresses and garments is an otherworldly journey. Photographer Amanda Anderson artfully captures Shelley's designs, style, and overall vision during fantasy photoshoots they call, "The Magick Experience," which inspires soul expression, transforming women into an enchanting realm. Shelley appropriately conveys her confidence in doing something so different than everything else. This confidence is newfound and based on realizing she is now living what she calls "her soul purpose or Meraki." Meraki is a Greek term that means to do something with love, passion and creativity; to put something of yourself into your work. That's a kind of confidence that doesn't come easily, and Shelley has been through a lot to get to this point.

The main component to Shelley's art is gathering and recycling. She gets nearly all her items in nature or second-hand, through thrift and a network of people who donate items to find a place in her art. What's now an aesthetic and intentional decision was born out of necessity. Years ago, Shelley was a single parent raising young children. "At that point I did not have a lot of money," said Shelley. "But I loved art and creating. So, I would thrift, find things in nature, that sort of thing." Shelley couldn't afford trips to Michael's or Hobby Lobby but found other ways to make art. She had a network of nearby farmers that would let her dig through their junk piles accumulating for generations, filled with rusty patina and farm treasures. Through neighbors and friends who owned auction and estates sales businesses, she accumulated dress forms, mannequins, old windows, furniture, and vintage

clothing. This set her on the journey of repurposing and upscaling as "junk art," giving the vintage, forgotten, and discarded new life.

"I have a keen eye for seeing what things can be transformed into. My kids would cringe because I'd be driving them to school, still in my pajamas, and then pull over when I saw something on the side of the road," said Shelley. "They'd be hiding, they were so embarrassed. But I would bring it home and make it into something new." Eventually, Shelley made her way up to the Northwoods. She had stopped the "junk art," and began to work on herself. Taking classes, she realized that the process of creating was the key component to finding her joy. "I realized I was kind of creating for other people to make them happy, or to make a sale at an art fair," said Shelley. "And not even realizing it's about how I feel when I'm doing something, when I'm in my creative mode."

She made a commitment to herself to expand and create new opportunities for growth. To begin a new life pattern, she branched out of her social circle and started joining different local women's workshops and gatherings, some in-person and some online. She tried new things such as felting, hooping and cold-water dipping. Within these groups she met people who were uplifting and positive. They encouraged her to pursue her own identity which included her unique brand of art. This involves the trans-

ARTIST



formation of natural elements and recycled materials into wearable art. She regularly deconstructs thrifted clothing for raw materials like yarn, buys bags of broken jewelry for cheap, and collects pieces of nature like pine boughs from the woods near her home. These seemingly dissimilar items she then brings together into her wearable art.

Shelley is now doing what she loves, with what she calls a tribe or sisterhood of creatives who nurture her growth. "It's amazing to meet people who support you and actually believe in you," said Shelley. "I'm always like that with other people, but sometimes it's not reciprocated. Now I'm finding beautiful, great people just by putting myself out there.

To put it simply, Shelley's advice is to pursue what makes you happy, and surround yourself with people who support that mission. Even if it is "out there" or different. New opportunities keep popping up for Shelley. A local creator asked her to make costumes for a horror film. It's something Shelley had never considered before, but she's already totally on board with the project. "Doors just keep opening," said Shelley. "If you're on the right track, that's what happens."

To see more of Shelley's work, go to shelleynovotny.com

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