



Mary Fisher wears many hats: Artist, author, and HIV/AIDS activist are just a few. The latter is perhaps what she's known best for—her influential speech at the 1992 Republican National Convention is regarded as one of the greatest American speeches of the century, spurring a push toward treatment and compassion towards those who are HIV-positive. Yet Fisher's decades-long career in mixed-media artistry has flourished alongside her activism.

"For some folks, activism is what they've chosen to do, but that wasn't and isn't my experience," Fisher, who was diagnosed as HIV-positive in 1991, says. "My activism is an expression of who I am beginning as a woman and a woman with AIDS. When I've produced a book or given a speech or produced a sculpture, I've always tried to make it a truthful reflection of who I am, and I think most artists do while they're working. Whether or not it's activism, I think it reflects who we are, what we are and how we feel."

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Until February 10, viewers can experience this intersection in "Textile Meditations: Mary Fisher and Friends," which opens today at the Armory Art Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. Fisher's works in fabric will be shown alongside four accomplished female artists from the U.S. and London: Jan Beaney and Jean Littlejohn, Jane Dunnewold, and Marsha Christo. Fisher's heavily layered works (of which she has created over 80 for the Armory show) are filled with sinuous stitching and, in a sharp departure from her signature style, are without words. These pieces will join panels of intricate textures and rich colors in all shapes and sizes.



*Windfall* by Mary Fisher.

As Fisher describes the artists' unique styles, it's clear that they are more than just collaborators—Fisher regards them all as true friends. After taking classes with Beaney and Littlejohn, Fisher fell in love with their creativity and warm personalities. "Jan is an artist who sketches her surroundings constantly and translates those scenes into textiles, and Jean really challenges the expectations of textiles," Fisher says. "And they both have the most incredible sense of humor." Of Christo, Fisher says, "I've known her for 30

years—she and her husband work with me in my studio," adding, "When I think of color, I think of Marsha." Dunnewold, Fisher explains, is steeped in design and well-known in the textile world. And beyond that, she's a close confidant. "She's inspiring, collaborative, and we have the same heart," Fisher says. "I'm so fortunate I've been able to work with her."

The complex nature—not to mention the sheer number—of works in "Textile Meditations" may seem daunting, but it allows visitors to explore the interchange of ideas and styles between the artists, in addition to providing a breadth of examples of textile arts, which are often relegated to the mere corners of a show.

"We set this up more than a year ago, and we have five strong women's voices being expressed by their art and their textiles," Fisher says. "In this period of American history when women are finding and using their voices, it's really serendipitous."