

SALLEY MAVOR

Bedtime Stitches



SEPTEMBER 11 ~ DECEMBER 22, 2020

Cahoon
Museum **Art**
OF AMERICAN



INTRODUCTION

Debuting the original artwork for Salley Mavor's latest book, *My Bed: Enchanting Ways to Fall Asleep around the World*, the Cahoon Museum presents a series of sculptural embroideries that celebrate cultural differences and highlight the universal theme of children sleeping safe in their beds. For *My Bed*, author Rebecca Bond created the book's poem and Salley Mavor illustrated accompanying scenes which bring children and their varying surroundings to life.

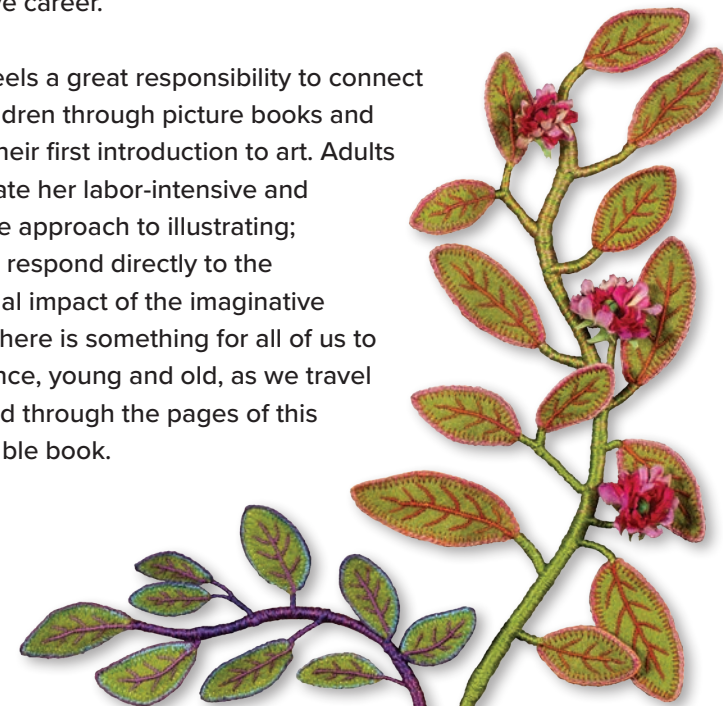
To begin the process of creating artwork for the book, Salley read the manuscript carefully to see if the narrative evoked strong imagery in her mind's eye. She knew from her previous experiences illustrating books, that a clear vision is important since making the illustrations can take up to two years to complete.

To portray a distinct sense of place for each culture, Salley researched the children, architecture, furnishings, and landscapes of different regions. She then sketched out the pages of a thirty-two page children's book. After showing the mockup to her editor and getting the go-ahead, she gathered materials from her extensive supplies and started stitching. First, she made the children and fell in love with the characters, which motivated her to build places for them to live. It took from six weeks to two

months to complete each scene, which she worked on entirely by hand, one stitch at a time.

Each artwork is much like a shallow stage set, with scenery, props and characters assembled in shadow-box frames. They are made with a variety of materials, including fabric, beads, wire and found objects, with techniques that the artist developed during her extensive career.

Salley feels a great responsibility to connect with children through picture books and create their first introduction to art. Adults appreciate her labor-intensive and inventive approach to illustrating; children respond directly to the emotional impact of the imaginative world. There is something for all of us to experience, young and old, as we travel the world through the pages of this remarkable book.



"My earliest memories have to do with making things by hand and expressing myself through art. What I make today and how I do it, is the culmination of a life-long search to find ways of translating what I imagine into something real to share."



SALLEY MAVOR

Award winning artist Salley Mavor (b. 1955) has spent four decades developing her signature style and working methods, carving out her own niche within the children's book world and the fiber art community. Her creative expression ranges from three-dimensional sculptural illustrations for children's books to satirical political commentary in the form of stop-motion animated videos.

Salley grew up in the seaside village of Woods Hole, Massachusetts in a family who connected with their community through art, music, and dance. In this open and supportive environment, Salley found that there were always art supplies close at hand and time available for creative pursuits.



SALLEY MAVOR: BEDTIME STITCHES

Drawing with crayons was never enough for Salley. She recalls, "I remember feeling that my pictures were not finished until something real was glued, stapled or sewn to it." At a young age, she held an open-minded view of what



constitutes art, writing in a school essay at age 10, "Art is everything... records, clocks, blackboards, people, snowflakes and everything. That is why I like art."

As an illustration major at the Rhode Island School of Design in the 1970s, Salley left traditional mediums behind, preferring to communicate her ideas through sculptural needlework. Salley has illustrated eleven picture books, including *Pocketful of Posies*, which won the 2011 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award and the 2011 Golden Kite Award. Her popular how-to book, *Felt Wee Folk* is in its 2nd edition, inspiring creativity in all ages. *My Bed: Enchanting Ways to Fall Asleep around the World* is her most recent publication. Salley lives and works in her home studio in Falmouth, Massachusetts.

SALLEY'S PROCESS

Salley describes in her own words and pictures how she approached illustrating *My Bed* – from the initial sketches through the many stages of creating the three-dimensional scenes that are reproduced in the book. She highlights different aspects of her working methods and gives a glimpse into her thought process as she makes choices along the way.

SKETCHES

When I first read Rebecca Bond's manuscript for *My Bed*, I imagined scenes jam-packed with patterns and textures infused with a warm sense of home. I kept this vision in mind when I studied reference photos of children, buildings and landscapes from different regions of the world, looking for characteristics that portrayed a distinct sense of place for each culture. I took this knowledge and drew thumbnail sketches, progressing from loose impressions to more developed compositions. Then, I enlarged the drawings to full size and used them as guides for the finished artwork.

FABRICS

For each scene in the book, I took great care in selecting just the right fabrics from my vast supply. I favored naturally dyed wool felt and upholstery fabric because of its sturdiness,

versatility and jewel-like colors. I also picked fabrics that I've kept in storage for decades, such as age-stained linen passed down from my grandmother, which I used to replicate the texture of a Japanese tatami mat. When I couldn't find printed patterns that were tiny enough for some

scenes, I embroidered designs on fabric or felt to match the miniature scale.



STITCHING

I stitched the artwork for *My Bed* entirely by hand, in the tiniest detail, with a simple needle and thread. I embroidered, wrapped and bound together a variety of materials with techniques I've developed through many years of experimentation. Sewing machines can't replicate the look and feel that I want. Manipulating materials in my hands is the best way I've found to translate what I imagine into something real to share.

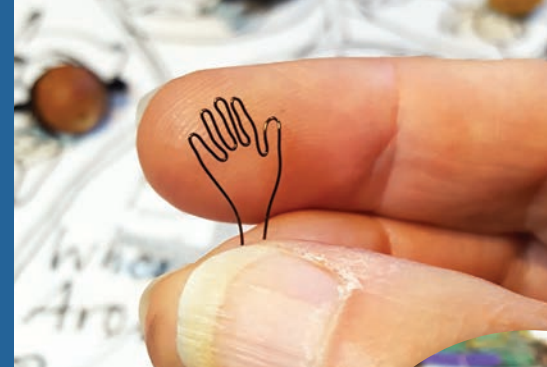


BEADS

To add a touch of three-dimensional whimsy and help bring out the charm of the little environments, I sewed on beads of all types. The bead selection process was like an audition for bit parts in a play. I combed through my overflowing collection of beads made of glass, clay, shells and bone, searching for the precise type and size to make plants, roof tiles or pieces of furniture appear more true-to-life.

WIRE

Besides fabric, thread and beads, the most essential element in my artwork is wire. I used it as a structural framework to keep limp materials firm and upright and to form free-standing shapes. Sometimes, working with wire seemed like drawing lines suspended in midair. I covered all the visible wire with thread and incorporated it into the overall design, creating a detailed sculptural effect that invites the viewer into another world.



FIGURES

My first real introduction to the children in the book occurred when I painted their faces on wooden beads. As I continued to work on their bodies, form their little fingers and sew their pint-sized pajamas and nighties, I fell in love with them. Then, it didn't matter how much time it took to bring the children to life and create the places they call home.





FOUND OBJECTS

I've spent my whole life amassing an eclectic assortment of interesting small treasures, from natural bits and pieces to metal findings. When I see found objects with special features that I think will convincingly replicate something in miniature scale, I put them aside and occasionally, they make it into my artwork. These items are used for emphasis, like exclamation points, as a way to bring in a form of realism that enhances the storytelling. But, I am careful not to overdo it, lest the objects themselves take too much attention away from the overall subject.



ANIMALS

Throughout the book, individual stitched felt animals are pictured on white text panels adjacent to the scenes. I want them to act as visual cues, which readers can identify and associate with the different regions of the world. The animals are like cultural icons, made in a folk art style and size reminiscent of the stuffed fabric pins I made when I started out in the 70's. For a page near the end of the book, I made the animals in even smaller scale and gathered them in the bedroom of a sleeping child who represents all the children of the world.



THE EXHIBIT



1. SALLEY MAVOR
Front cover, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 15 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

2. SALLEY MAVOR
Back Cover, 2020
Mixed media
14 h x 14 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

3. SALLEY MAVOR
Endpapers (Animal Icons)
2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

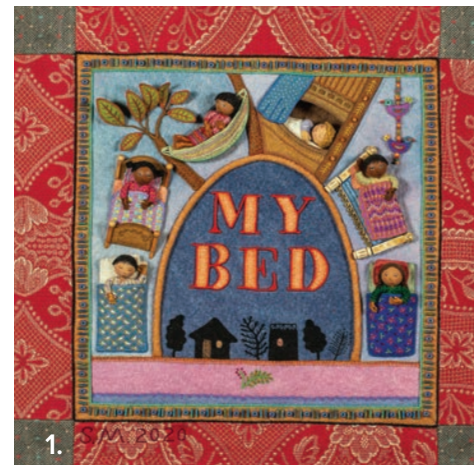
4. SALLEY MAVOR
Netherlands, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

5. SALLEY MAVOR
South America, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

6. SALLEY MAVOR
India, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

7. SALLEY MAVOR
Scandinavia
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

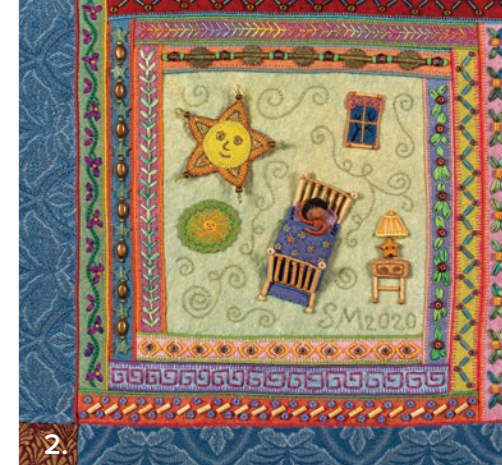
8. SALLEY MAVOR
Afghanistan, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist



1.



14.



2.

9. SALLEY MAVOR
Ghana, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

11. SALLEY MAVOR
Mongolia, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

13. SALLEY MAVOR
Africa, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

15. SALLEY MAVOR
Japan, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

10. SALLEY MAVOR
Russia, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

12. SALLEY MAVOR
Iran, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

14. SALLEY MAVOR
North America, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

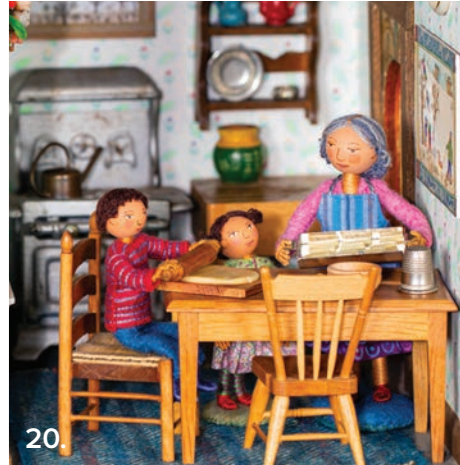
16. SALLEY MAVOR
Night Sky, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist



29.



23.



20.

17. SALLEY MAVOR
Home, 2020
Mixed media
15 h x 19 w x 2.5 d
Collection of the Artist

19. SALLEY MAVOR
Self Portrait: A Personal History of Fashion
Mixed media
Collection of the Artist

18. SALLEY MAVOR
Good Night, 2020
Mixed media
14 h x 14 w
Collection of the Artist

20. SALLEY MAVOR
Doll House, 1975
Plywood, old shingles, paper, hardwood, paint
Collection of the Artist

21. SALLEY MAVOR
Furniture
Vintage, new and handmade
Collection of the Artist

22. SALLEY MAVOR
Dolls, 2015
Wooden beads, wire, wool felt, assorted fabrics, embroidery thread
Collection of the Artist

23. SALLEY MAVOR
Modular Village, 1977
Masonite, assorted fabric, cardboard, ribbon and trims, beads.
Collection of the Artist

24. SALLEY MAVOR
Stuffed Pins, 1977-1980
Assorted fabrics, beads, cardboard, thread, pin back
Collection of the Artist

25. SALLEY MAVOR
Insects, 1979
Wire, vintage fabrics, wire, hooks and eyes, beads, thread
Collection of the Artist

26. SALLEY MAVOR
Lichen Lookout, 2013
Wood, trumpet vine seed pods, wire, felt, lichen, pinecones, acorn caps, glass beads, thread
Collection of the Artist

27. SALLEY MAVOR
Assorted Fairies, 2010-2013
Wooden bead, acorn caps, wool fleece, wool felt, wire, thread, faux flowers
Collection of the Artist

28. SALLEY MAVOR
Grate Hall, 2015
Vintage cheese graters, heirloom glove, beads, wire, felt, wire whisk, shells, vintage door handle hardware, glass crystals, grape vines
Collection of the Artist

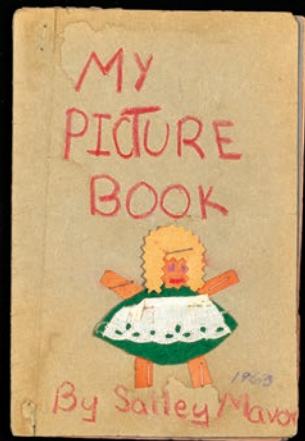
29. SALLEY MAVOR
Polly Doll and Clothesline, 2012
Wooden bead, wire, wool felt, cotton fabric, thread
Collection of the Artist

30. SALLEY MAVOR
Wee Willie Winkie, 2015
Props for stop-motion animation
Collection of the Artist

31. SALLEY MAVOR
Houses
Driftwood, wool felt, beads and metal findings
Collection of the Artist



26.



38.



35.



40.

32. SALLEY MAVOR
Clock
 Wood, wool felt, thread,
 beads, metal screws, vintage
 china
 Collection of the Artist
33. SALLEY MAVOR
Wee Folk Studio Logo
 Props for stop motion
 animation: wooden beads,
 wire, wool felt, cotton fabric,
 thread
 Collection of the Artist

34. SALLEY MAVOR
House, 2014
 Wood, glass beads, wool felt,
 wire, lace, thread
 Collection of the Artist
35. SALLEY MAVOR
Felt Wee Folk
 Sample Figures from How-to-
 Book, 2015
 Wooden beads, wire,
 wool felt, assorted fabrics,
 embroidery thread
 Collection of the Artist

36. SALLEY MAVOR
Cart, 2015
 Thread spools, bed spring
 parts, driftwood
 Collection of the Artist
37. SALLEY MAVOR
Vintage Swedish Dala horse
 Collection of the Artist
38. SALLEY MAVOR
My Picture Book – 1963
 Collection of the Artist

39. SALLEY MAVOR
 Composition book – 1965
 “What I Want to Be”
 Collection of the Artist
40. SALLEY MAVOR
Mushrooms and Fairy, 2015
 Mushrooms: kid leather,
 polymer clay, acrylic paint
 Fairy: wooden bead,
 faux flowers, wire, felt,
 embroidery floss, acorn
 cap, kid leather



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Cahoon Museum of American Art is pleased to launch *Salley Mavor: Bedtime Stitches*. The art exhibition opening coincided with the release of Mavor's most recent book, *MY BED: Enchanting Ways to Fall Asleep Around the World*. The colorful, detailed embroidered scenes are both astounding as illustrations in *MY BED* and magical to experience in person.

Bedtime Stitches features examples of Mavor's work that span her career, from her childhood composition notebooks, creative projects created during her art student days at Rhode Island School of Design, her popular Wee Felt Folk, Polly Doll, fairy houses, a newly refurbished doll house filled with her creations, to her new sculptural embroideries created for *MY BED*. This exhibition also includes an in-depth look at Mavor's artistic practice and processes, giving a glimpse inside the artist's studio.

I deeply thank Salley Mavor for her collaboration in creating this exhibition, her dedication to her craft, and her inspiring creative vision. I treasure Salley's long friendship with the Cahoon, going back to her solo exhibition, *Poetic Sampler* in 1997 to her participation in the more recent, *Twisted, Twined and Woven: Contemporary Fiber Art* in 2018.

Many thanks go to the Coby Foundation for their support of *Bedtime Stitches*. The Cahoon Museum is honored to be among those projects in the fashion, needle arts, and textile fields that are brought to a broad audience through Coby Foundation grants.



I also thank Annie Dean for her support in helping realize *Bedtime Stitches* at the Cahoon Museum; her creative input and planning, including an innovative digital presence, made all the difference in the excellent presentation.

The Cahoon Museum is grateful to Rob Goldsborough for his wonderful photographs of Salley's artwork. Jennifer Nemece, Operations Manager, organized the installation of artwork, and Michelle Law, skillfully hung the work and brought the exhibit design to life. Lou Barnicle designed beautiful and whimsical exhibition graphics, and Amy Mason, Museum Store Consultant, kept the shop well-stocked with signed copies of *MY BED*. Thank you to Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, the book's publisher. My thanks go to the entire team!

And, as always, I am appreciative of the Cahoon Museum community – members, friends, and supporters – who share in the joy of art. Everything we do is for you!

– Sarah Johnson, Director

Salley Mavor: Bedtime Stitches was curated by Annie Dean, Special Project Consultant, and Cahoon Museum Director, Sarah Johnson, PhD.





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