A black and orange butterfly

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I’ve been drawn to images of the Tree of Life for many years. I’m interested in folklore, mythology and storytelling from all over the world. Stories of a great tree that symbolizes our connection to the world around us, and to the supernatural world, appear everywhere throughout our history. I am also obsessed with animals of all kinds, and have spent many years representing them as dolls, puppets, and soft sculptures, and in drawings, paintings and embroidered textiles.

I have made multiple versions of a tree populated with animals, birds and insects of all kinds, both as a sculpture with multiple elements, and as a wall installation with three dimensional soft-sculpture creatures. For this version of the Tree, I made the various creatures in a two-dimensional form using layers of thick wool felt, silk, and other fabrics, embellished with applique, embroidery and beading. I decided to disregard conventional proportions and relative sizes and chose instead to represent each animal in whatever size felt appropriate in the moment. There is a bee larger than a frog, a fox nearly as large as an elephant. Each animal is embellished in whatever manner seems to suit the individual form. Some have elaborate embroidery and beadwork to reflect richly patterned animals; others seem to want a quieter approach, with simple outlines to reflect the silhouettes. The tree that connects the creatures is drawn with Sumi ink on Japanese paper.

Creating this installation has helped me to feel centered and balanced and in touch with the natural world, at a time when the world seems to want to burst apart, on both a personal and a global scale. The hours of repetitive hand stitching, embroidery and beading are as close as I come to a spiritual or meditative practice.

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