

# FRIENDSHIP

The Enduring Art of Ali



PUCKER GALLERY  
BOSTON

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## The Enduring Art of Ali

First, I have to say that I am deeply honored to have been asked to write this forward. I LOVE Ali's work, I love Ali, and I am a dedicated fan and collector of her genius.

When Pucker Gallery was in a far smaller space on Newbury Street, a sub-street level basement, I used to wander down the stairs from time to time to see the many treasures there. I was always greeted warmly and made to feel welcome by Bernie and his assistant, Anita. In 1977, I was completely smitten with the newly discovered works of a young artist painting with textiles, netting, lace, string, gold metallic threads, patterned cloth, yarn. No paint, no charcoal, no pencil. I was dazzled by the creativity of Ali Cliff and began to dream of

come into my house. The painting reflects Ali's amazing capacity to deal with light and shadows, a signature of her work. Its vast space invites the viewer to question what is happening. Why are we here? As Bernie's oft quoted dear friend, Brother Thomas, said: "It is amazing how shadows form in spaces where we ourselves cannot go." Ali's work makes it possible to visit those places within us.

That first painting led to another, and another, and many more. They are an integral part of my life. They are quite magical, nourishing to my soul. They give me great joy and feel like part of my family. Guests are astonished when I explain that Ali's work is not created with paint at all (her work needs to be well lit to see the many tiny details).

## "WITH ALI'S WORK, IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT."

owning a piece of her work, never thinking it would be possible. However, I soon managed (through Bernie's kindness I paid over a four-year period) to own my very first Ali in 1977.

During the decade of Ali's Circus period, her paintings were lonely worlds of illusion with vast spaces populated by one or two tiny figures. The first painting I bought, a huge vertical called *Circus Still Life 1*, is the first thing people see when they

They look closely, astonished that those shadows, that mystery, that beauty is created with layer upon layer of various fabrics. Ali's work is incredibly original; she is uniquely imaginative. It seems impossible to create such realistic images without the aid of paint, pencil, pastels, but somehow, magically, she does.

Over the years, Ali has evolved from her Circus period to paintings of Grand Canyon scenes,



*After Rehearsal*, 1986  
Cloth painting  
42 x 32"  
AC138 (MF)



violins in framed boxes, jackets portraying a variety of activities and messages, and works inspired by her many trips to Mexico. In my desire to keep up, I have collected her work from many of the periods and cannot imagine my home without her art.

It gives me substantial joy to see what she is contemplating next and to see how her sense of beauty, texture, and color keeps evolving. Only a prodigious talent like Ali can keep inventing and creating over decades. One of my favorite paintings is *The Letter*, which she created for her late husband. Having lost my husband, Bud Collins, six years ago, this hauntingly beautiful, lacy, floral painting speaks volumes to me and hangs in a place of honor in our dining room. It is a glorious work of art, lace curtains gently framing the scene, white lilies, a red carnation on the desk next to a two-page letter. What words did she write? And beyond, an open window to the outdoors with a multihued sky.

Another favorite of mine, also a huge vertical painting, *Friend of the Harlequin (Woman in White)* features an elegant, mysterious figure. I marvel at how Ali pieced the fabric together, an astonishing achievement of shadows and highlights, a sumptuous white lace gown whose sleeves and neckline are trimmed with strings of tiny pearls. The woman's face is partially covered, her left eye gazes out, and her red hair flies in the wind. She holds a red flower on a long stalk. It reminds me a great deal of the artist herself, but Ali assures me it is not a self-portrait!

Ali's paintings featuring water and waterfalls, such as swimmers in the turquoise pools of the Grand Canyon, are remarkable. I feel the coolness and rush of the water, the thrill of leaping into it, the play of light on the water, on the rocks, the turquoise sky. I marvel at the impossibility that it is all done with fabrics. These paintings are heroic in feeling, capturing the splendor of nature.

Ali keeps creating and inventing, and now we are being treated to a retrospective and can see together decades of work, from the beginning of her career through the present. I am curious to see her current work, to see how she continues to evolve and generate new and important ideas. It is inspirational to me to observe her capacity for invention, always with great sensitivity. Thanks to Bernie and Sue and their welcoming nature, I met Ali early in the days of collecting her work. Like her work, she is warm and approachable. I treasure her friendship and feel that knowing her enhances my appreciation of her work.

I recently hosted a dinner for the board of the Bach, Beethoven and Brahms Society, a recent addition to the vibrant musical scene in Boston. There were thirty-five people, only some of whom had seen Ali's work and knew of her. All were dazzled and wanted more information. It gives me great pleasure to have been introduced to Ali's work over 40 years ago, and since then to have lived with her magical paintings and been able to share them with others. She is a rare treasure.

— Anita Klaussen



*The Striped Flag*, 1980  
Cloth painting  
47 x 48"  
AC69





*Grand Canyon XXI*, 2008  
Cloth painting  
48 x 18.5"  
AC295



*In the Nether I*, 2010  
Cloth painting  
57 x 26"  
AC317



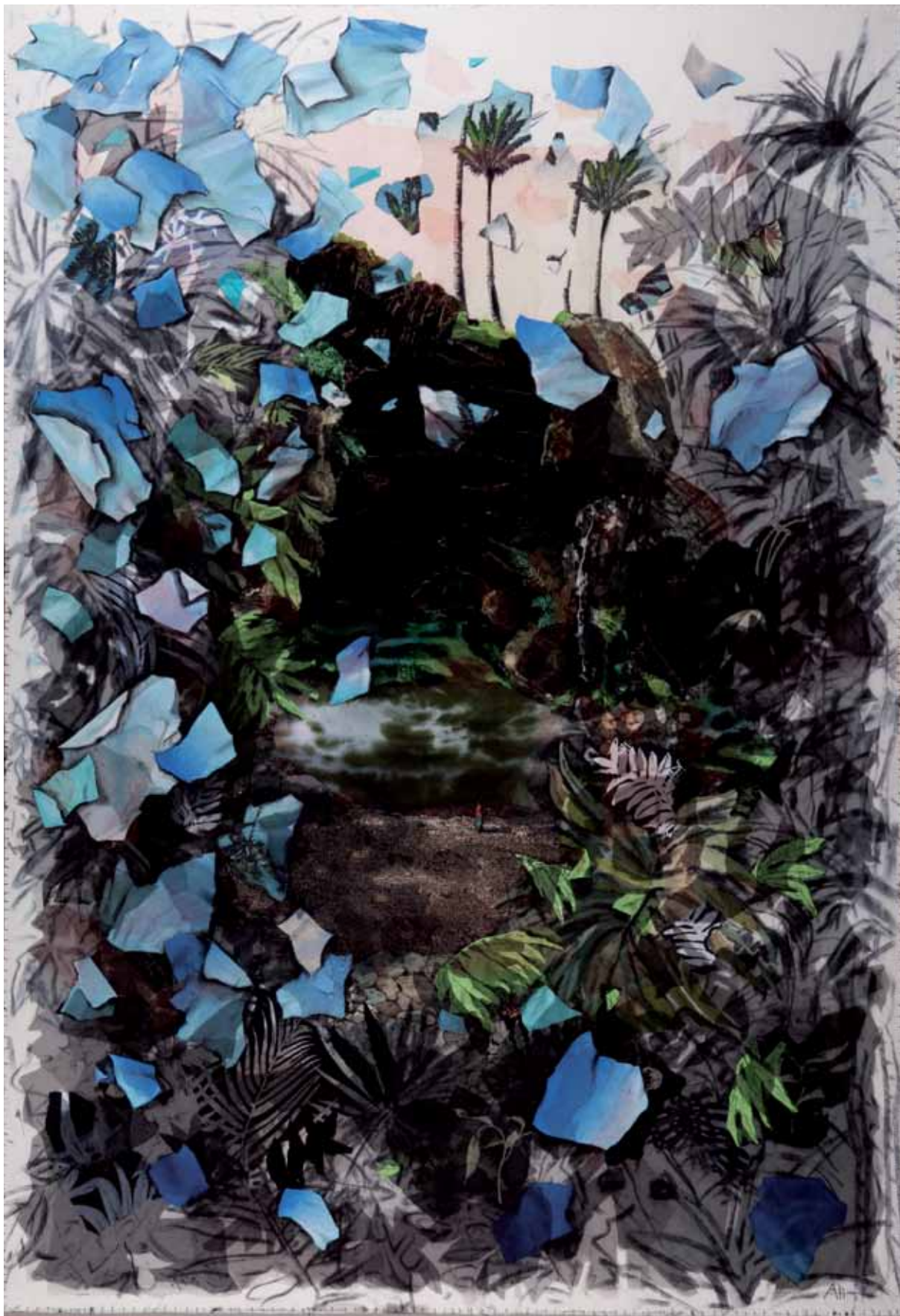
*Grand Canyon XVII, 2007*  
Cloth painting  
70 x 43"  
AC291





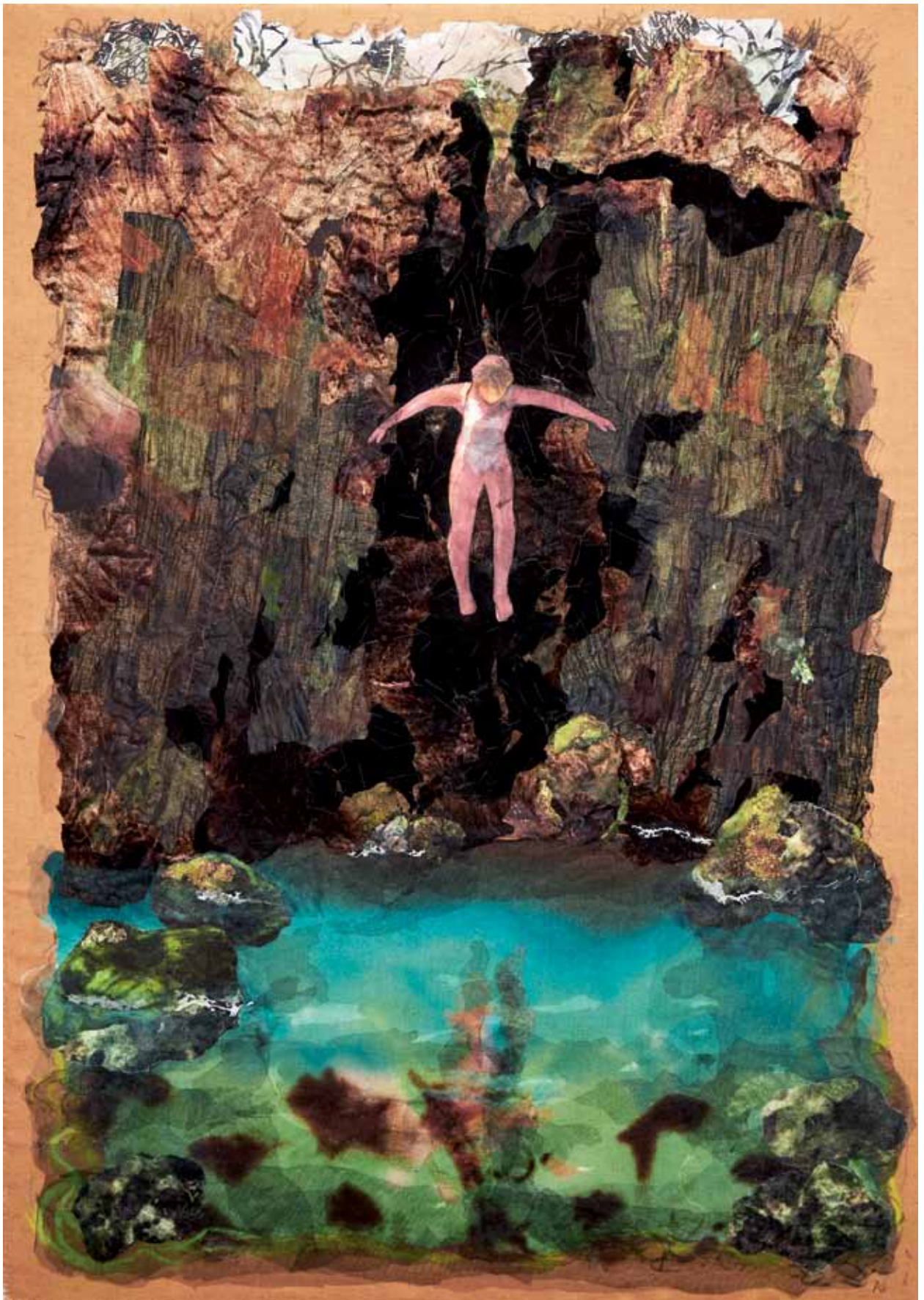
Go Fly a Kite, 2021  
Cloth painting  
36 x 35.5"  
AC392





*Sky Blue*, 2011  
Cloth painting  
48 x 32.5"  
AC335





*Suspended*, 2022  
Cloth painting  
51 x 36"  
AC393





*A River Runs Through* (Triptych), 2011  
 Cloth painting  
 15 x 16" each  
 AC334



*La Mesita*, 1995  
 Cloth painting  
 22.25 x 18.25"  
 AC184



*Las Mandarinas (Tangerines)*, 1994  
Cloth painting  
16.75 x 13.75"  
AC178



*Red Tablecloth*, 1997  
Cloth painting  
25 x 21.75"  
AC206 (DF)





*Last Letter*, 2004  
Cloth painting  
36.5 x 41.75"  
AC261



1966, 2002  
Cloth painting  
38 x 28"  
AC236

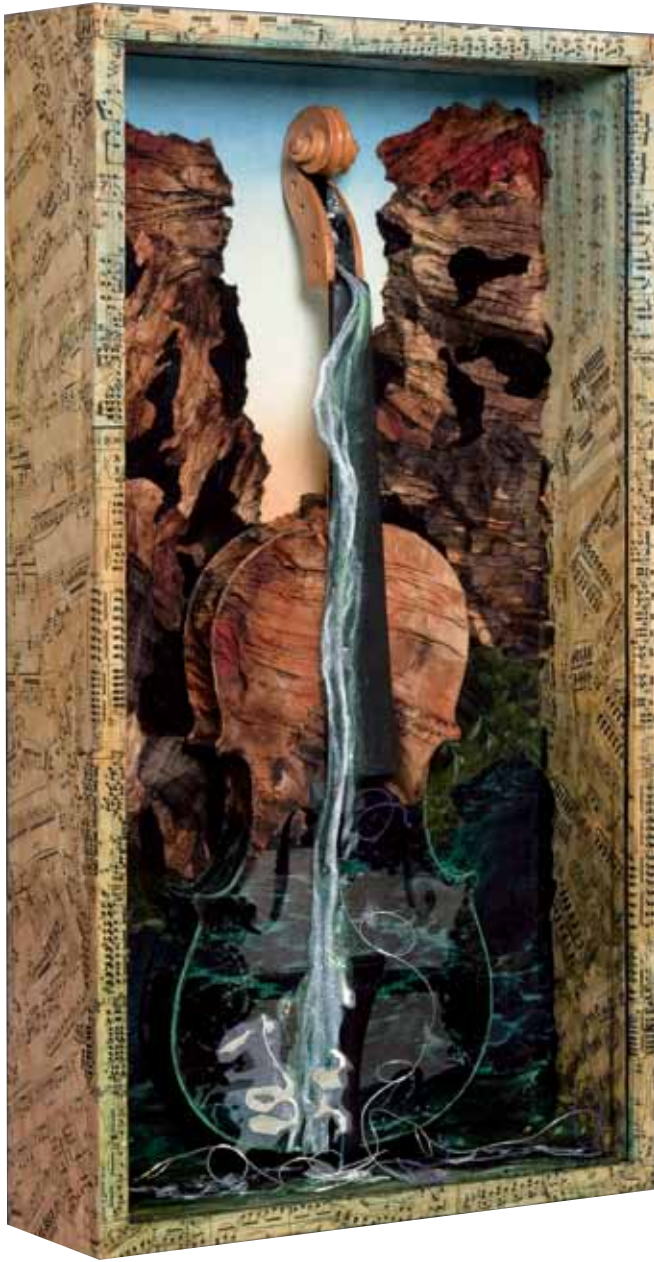


Amaryllis III, 2016  
Cloth painting  
29 x 21"  
AC371





*A Special Place*, 2000  
Cloth painting  
57 x 57"  
AC224



*Air & Simple Gifts*, 2009  
Cloth painting and construction  
26 x 14 x 14"  
AC302







*Through the Mist, 2009*  
Cloth painting  
60 x 22.5"  
AC305



*Open Spaces II*, 1983  
Cloth painting  
48 x 45"  
AC111





*Out of the Blue*, 2005  
Cloth painting  
31.5 x 35"  
AC268

Alison Cliff's unique and mysterious cloth paintings are delicately crafted using fabric. Born in 1949 in Nova Scotia, Ali is a graduate of Tufts University and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Her first cloth paintings were inspired technically by a picture composed of small cloth pieces at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. Throughout her artistic career, Ali has been fascinated by the challenge of creating an authentic sense of space through the illusion of fabric. As she continues to expand her creative process, each new body of work introduces distinct subjects and a notable change in her

exploration of cloth as a medium for painting. An ardent and engaged traveler, she shares, literally and figuratively, fragments of her experiences in new environments. Ali's earlier works inspired by Mexico are featured in the book *Paintings of the Last Decade: Still Life*, which is the second publication featuring the artist. The first, entitled *Ali Beyond the Big Top: The Cloth Paintings and Graphic Works*, explores her successful circus-themed works. Ali's art has been represented by Pucker Gallery since 1977 and is included in public collections in New England, New York, Canada, Israel, Vietnam, and Bali. She resides in Chelsea, Massachusetts and Naples, Florida.

**PUCKER**  
ESTABLISHED 1967 BOSTON  
**GALLERY**

**PUCKER GALLERY**

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**GALLERY HOURS:**

Monday through Saturday  
10 AM to 5:30 PM

Sunday 1 PM to 5 PM

We are open to all and taking the necessary precautions for visitor and staff safety. We welcome appointments to maximize visitor experience.

Pucker Gallery is a member of the Boston Art Dealers Association and the New England Appraisers Association.

**CREDITS:**

**Design:** Leslie Anne Feagley

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to view current and past  
exhibition catalogues  
and subscribe to the  
*Artwork of the Week*  
email list.

**Cover:**  
*My Sunflowers, 2022*  
Cloth painting  
35 x 40.5"  
AC395



*Joy, 2022*  
Cloth painting  
36.5 x 30"  
AC394

## FRIENDSHIP

The Enduring Art of Ali

**DATES:**

11 March through 9 April 2023

**PUBLIC OPENING RECEPTION:**

Saturday 1 April 2023, 3 PM to 6 PM  
The artist will be present.

**ONLINE EVENTS:**

Please visit [www.puckergallery.com](http://www.puckergallery.com) for a list of virtual gatherings and events accompanying *Friendship: The Enduring Art of Ali*.