



Dr. Sallie Marston

The Alexander & Ilse Melamid Medal

for outstanding work on the
dynamic relationship between
human culture and natural
resources

In 2002 Ilse Melamid created the Alexander and Ilse Melamid Medal to recognize “outstanding work on the dynamic relationship between human culture and natural resources.” Mrs. Melamid knew then that the fate of the planet and humanity lay in making culture and resources work better together. This year’s Melamid medalist, Sallie Marston, Regents Professor Emerita at the University of Arizona, is hard at work on the task.

Marston can be described as a geographer’s geographer. She is a political geographer, theorist of space and place, with a commitment to social justice. She has written much and well and been an important participant in all the institutions of the field. Her writings take on geography’s classic issues. Her most cited article, published in *Progress in Human Geography*, is a discussion of scale. She addresses the prevailing theoretical discussions of the concept, critiques them, and insists that subjectivity is central to its understanding. While abstract as a concept, scale has immediacy, affecting people’s lives, activities, spaces, relationships, and self-images. Hers is an interesting discussion, with particular sensitivity to the more marginalized of society’s members. Issues of gender and where women’s lives fit into spatial relationships. Keep reading through her writing and you find that theme addressed consistently and thoughtfully. She could well receive a medal for that work. But natural resources, a central part of the Melamid award, were of less concern.

Then, over a decade ago Marston’s work took on a new cast when a former student approached her to do an independent study creating a school garden in a Tucson Title 1 school. From one student and one school the effort, now known as the Community and School Garden Program, has grown to encompass all Title 1 schools in the region, serving thousands of college students as interns, K-12 students, teachers, and community members, all active developers of the program. It has transformed learning. STEM-heavy, it has infused ecological knowledge, other sciences, and math into everyday life and learning. At least as important, it has changed people’s relationships to their space and place and given a sense of control over physical, social, and even political environments. Those involved may learn about indigenous seeds for food or health, irrigation systems, drought responses, experimental methods, and measurement, but they also learn about and learn to value their very local places, questions, devices for answering them, and themselves, and their ability to define themselves and their spaces. The model has generated interest and adoption around the world.

Marston, co-founder and now consultant, describes her involvement in this project as a labor of love. This transformative work exemplifies the ambition of the Melamid medal. It powerfully changes the relationship between human culture and natural resources and, strikingly, this for a particularly vulnerable population. Describing the significance of the project, Marston the social critic says, “we need to prefigure the politics and social relations we want to see.” That’s what this project does. Writer Hector Tobar calls on us to “dedicat{e} our energy and our intellects to creat[e] new ways of being in the world.” That’s what Marston does.

Therefore, for these reasons and more, on behalf of its grateful members, worldwide scholars, and all who recognize the importance of excellence in geographical research and exploration, The American Geographical Society honors Professor Sallie Marston by presenting her with the Alexander and Ilse Melamid Medal on this the 17th day of November in the year 2023 in New York City.