

Embedded Biography: Kim Flora's Encaustic Paintings

Just five years out of the Art Academy of Cincinnati, Kim Flora has created a notable body of work. The dozen paintings that are illustrated in this catalogue from her February 2010 exhibition are convincing proof that she has found her way into a consistent painting procedure. This procedure appears satisfying for Flora now, but it retains challenges that will lead her on to future paintings.

Encaustic painting has enjoyed a revival since the 1960s when such artists as Jasper Johns and Bryce Marden reintroduced the medium of melted wax infused with pigment in order to achieve surfaces and marks that were judged to be more gravid and profound. Their work contrasted to the slick bright Pop art canvases of their peers or the spattered and stained canvases of the generation before them. Looking further back, encaustic painting is as old as the ancient Egyptians who used the preservative powers of wax on wood for timeless images of their dead.

The new encaustic painting is encouraged by instructors like Cincinnati artist, Connie McClure, a dedicated practitioner of the history of painting. Her courses introduce al fresco, egg tempera, and oil techniques of the masters as well as encaustic painting. McClure encourages her students to experiment in ways that combine media and ultimately unlock their own creativity, a methodology Flora continues to embrace, outside the refuge of the Academy.

In the summer of 2000, Kim Flora came to the Art Academy of Cincinnati, having

already begun her studies at Pataspco High School and Center for the Arts, in Baltimore County, Maryland. Memories of the Chesapeake Bay region where she grew up and where she still returns are transferred to her paintings where they reside along with images of her newer Cincinnati surroundings. In that memory bank there is also room for travel notes, views of the US West Coast and Europe, captured and retained in snapshot photography.

The Baltimore Harbor is an industrial and commercial environment rich in American history and overwhelming in geographical scale. Flora remembers it from childhood and its affect is seen in a number of these recent paintings. There are fragments of that environment, the bridges, the wharves, the gantry cranes, the ships and the tall buildings on the perimeter of the harbor, that appear amidst a turbulent atmosphere whose sounds can almost be heard. To encourage these multiplying impressions for us, Flora has embedded photographic images captured from sources such as magazine illustrations and digital printouts that lie within the layers of waxy pigment. When these images become most visible and legible to the eye there is a simultaneous impression that a tremendous painterly space is being revealed to us. By creating microcosms in this macrocosm Kim Flora shows what she has accomplished by mastering encaustic painting.