

Wondrous Wax!



The most compelling, even haunting, force propelling my images is an unquenchable thirst for recording and expressing transformation. I try to synthesize different influences in my life into a rich and complex imagery that tells of the connection between the outer experience of daily life and the inner world of a developing spiritual heart.

From the time I was a child, I felt that there was something, an “essence “ to be found. The vehicle I chose for my quest was fine art. It is my yoga. My artistic expression has centered on painting and drawing, and, over time, I have included in my arsenal of media the following: oils, acrylics, watercolor, soft pastels, all drawing processes and intaglio printmaking. Wax is the newest member of my family. It grabbed me in August of 2010 with its amazing translucency and ability to synthesize my diversified methods of developing paintings. My recent work includes both Melted Beeswax (Hot Wax) and Cold Wax (a Wax Paste made from Beeswax, Damar Resin and a solvent).

When I first began working with wax, I limited myself to black & white media on 8”x8” 8 ply museum board glued to panels. The fact that I had no history with this medium, had looked at very little work done with wax and had never really established any criteria for “ good or bad” encaustic painting, gave me incredible freedom to play with this medium in a way that I have not felt with any other. *What if?* has become my internal mantra. I trained myself. I purchased several informative books on Encaustic and went at it. Soon I began making medium and paint. My experiments focused originally on incorporating a variety of mediums before I applied the wax. I gradually became more adventurous and experimental, waxing and layering with multiple mediums. I was and am fascinated by the both

contemporary and primal sensory feel of the wax. I draw, layer, scrape, carve and melt. These pieces have a unique presence and I have found I enjoy a smooth look to my work, as it enhances the multiple mediums and layers I attempt to include in my finished pieces.

One of the critical elements in my contemporary work is my inclusion of soft pastels into the mix. I will pulverize pastels in order to do “pastel glazing” on an encaustic piece or use direct m

In order to achieve the quality of layering that is so important to me, I needed to find a fixative that would seal both dry pastel and graphite images both before and after I applied a wax layer. I experimented with a fixative that I have been using for over 30 years for my soft pastel paintings and graphite drawings. It works beautifully and is very simple to make. The ingredients are ½ fat free milk and ½ 70% isopropyl rubbing alcohol. I apply the fixative with a Pre-Val paint sprayer, (which consists of a jar and small canister of butane gas), purchasable at any paint or hardware store. The sprayer releases a fine mist and usually works very well to seal both under the wax and on top. The beauty of this fixative is that, when applied and allowed to dry, it really seals the graphite powder and/ or soft pastel images. The alcohol evaporates and the casein of the milk holds the particles intact. In the image below, *Triange 7*, the graphite triangle was applied on top of a fused wax layer, fixative was sprayed on it, and allowed to dry (there is a water component in the milk). The image was lightly fused and a layer of clear medium was then applied on top.



Here is a sample of one of my graphite drawings- *Graphite Dream*



One of my 12"x12" encaustic pieces, *Playtime*, incorporates a ground of Joint compound, layered with graphite, alcohol wash, sprayed with fixative, waxed, with multiple graphic tools layering the piece.



Below is *Breaking Free*, another graphite/ encaustic piece (12"x12"). It was first coated with encaustic gesso. When dry, the surface was sprinkled with water. While wet, graphite powder was thickly sprinkled over the panel, the excess shaken off (best done outside!) and allowed to dry. When dry, the fixative was sprayed on the piece and again allowed to dry. Clear medium was then applied to the surface and fused. I continued to work on top of the wax with various mark making tools, including water based graphite sticks, marking pens, graphite powder through stencils, some soft pastel. I do spray with my fixative whenever I have added dry media, let dry, fuse and then apply clear medium.



I am often asked about my images- my content. While I work I form narratives in my mind that tell the story of the piece, much like a novelist creates characters or a composer clusters notes. It is an integral part of my process. And titles are poetry for me. In fact, they also become a summation of the journey I taken in the evolution of the piece. I work with images that resonate meaning for me and always view them in relationship to each other. In essence, I tell a story through my images, with or without incorporating text.



It is my hope that the viewer responds to the totality of the piece, its visual energy, whether or not one can articulate “ the story”.



My works have usually employed recognizable content and are represented in ambiguous spaces, watery and atmospheric. My experimentation with images has evolved with an understanding that there is a kind of internal logic linking certain forms with each other, a logic that, perhaps, belongs to the world of archetypes, and definitely forms its own iconography of symbols. Pieces are layered and developed over an extended period. Sequence, chronology and time play a significant role in these works, regardless of the medium. There is often an intentional blurring of boundaries between the physical and the psychical- this is what sustains my interest and what, for me, continuously opens up future possibilities.

I am an artist who is also an art educator. Teaching art became a significant aspect of my art practice very early- right out of graduate school. I have had the privilege of working with a great variety of students, and it is true that the instructor learns more from the student than does the student from the teacher. My orb of teaching has included artists ages 5-92-, mostly in art centers and private studios. While I teach many classes and workshops to adult students, my work with children holds a special place in my heart. One morning a week I teach art to first graders in a private school. I have maintained a rich affiliation with the Meher Schools in Lafayette, CA for many years. I actually set up the initial art department when the school first opened and have a deep regard for its educational philosophy. One afternoon a week I teach high school students in an independent home schooling program offered through a local school district and have done so for the last 12 years.

There is a careful balance required to maintain both a full teaching schedule and a professional art practice. I do not find it easy. I view the pendulum swing between the two as part of a perpetual continuum, sort of an eternal see-saw, in which I am continually striving for balance. I hold myself to very high standards and am not easily satisfied with my work- in any medium- It all seems a visual record of my journey toward a deeper understanding of *Why Am I Here?*

Here are 3 recent pieces that form a series for me: - all are 24"x30" on cradled panels



Happy Crossing



And Mama Says....

And the newest one,



Up, Down or In the Round?

“ All those things of the spirit and the mind, thought to be so nebulous, so other, find expression through the hand, taking up a material existence in the world. And what is achieved bears no relation to normal calculation of means and ends- the means so paltry- canvas, stretchers, pigments, whatever- the ends so vast- powers, glories, ecstasies of pleasure and terror. Painting proclaims the true incarnation, the union of matter and spirit... . Through the hand- this is the crucial point. Painting presents us with an image of the world reconstituted...

(emphasis mine).(P.23 Richard Hennessey, Art Forum Magazine, May 1979)

BIO:

Mira M. White is a painter with an exhibition record both domestic and international, and has been an art instructor for over 30 years. Her professional responsibilities include a full teaching schedule of classes and workshops in multiple media. Currently teaching at Lafayette Studio in Walnut Creek, Studio One Art Center in Oakland, Richmond Art Center and the Mendocino Art Center, she also organizes and conducts numerous workshops in Pastels, Watercolor and Mixed Media, including several painting workshops in other states and in France.

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