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Artist Profile: Hung Viet Nguyen

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Hung Viet Nguyen, Sacred Landscape IV #17; Image courtesy of the artist

Hung Viet Nguyen’s Metaphysical Landscapes

“Sometimes I long so much to do a landscape, just as one would go for a long walk to refresh oneself, and in all of nature, in trees for instance, I see expression and a soul.” ~Vincent van Gogh

Written by Betty Brown

Hung Viet Nguyen paints visionary landscapes that pulsate with richly saturated color and boldly impasto’ed texture. Brilliant coral sands sparkle beside cerulean waterways. Monumental pines glisten beneath sapphire skies. Trees, rocks and rivers undulate below mysterious mountain peaks. Although based on observations of nature, Hung’s biomorphic shapes vibrate with a spiritual essence, becoming more like Plato’s ideal forms than “objective”

scientific illustrations.

Hung’s “Ancient Pines” series presents trees that are hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years old: Methuselah, a Great Basin Bristelcone Pine in Inyo County, California, has been dated at 4,851 years. Even at that great age, these pines still have the elan vital. They continue to put forth new branches, new leaves, new living energy. The contrast between their heavy, gnarly bark and the light, lacy foliage creates a kind of visual oscillation that makes Hung’s “Ancient Pines” compositions both stable and dynamic.

While under quarantine, Hung has painted several panoramic landscapes. In one, a cluster of rounded stone mountains encases a turquoise river. The contrast of royal blue sky and orange vegetation heightens the system of oppositions in this composition: hard wood vs. soft water, harsh angles of ice vs. body-like rounded rocks, earth vs. sky. Hung does not refer to texture. Instead, he builds actual texture with thick layers of oil paint that are deeply furrowed with diverse brushstrokes. Sometimes it almost looks like he has combed the paint. His surfaces are “stitched” with cuts and grooves that weave through and animate it. Viewers may want to touch Hung’s canvases: His textures are irresistibly inviting.

Another quarantine image presents a pale chartreuse lake, fed by blue-green rivers, and contained by golden hills. Again, toothy mountain peaks line the horizon. A row of deep gray boulders lies below them, like an immense necklace adorning the field of vision.

Hung’s third quarantine landscape is a variation on the one discussed above. A sage green lake bifurcates the composition. Bilateral symmetry is maintained with paired cliffs, over which flow lava-like rivers that are the almost-iridescent color of glaciers. Below the icy mountain peaks and the five stalagmite-like piles of stones is a thin, foamy strip of pale peach. Scattered areas of deep rust-brown heighten the juxtapositions of complementary colors orange and blue.

In an 1888 letter to his brother Theo, Van Gogh explained his use of the complementary colors red and green in his *Night Cafe*: “I’ve tried to express the terrible human passions with the red and green.” (Van Gogh letter #676.) Hung does not seek to portray “terrible human passions.” Instead, he is—like Northern California writer Rebecca Solnit—looking at “landscape as a recourse, with the possibility of exiting the horizontal realm of social relations for a vertical alignment with earth and sky, matter and spirit.” Hung keeps “the

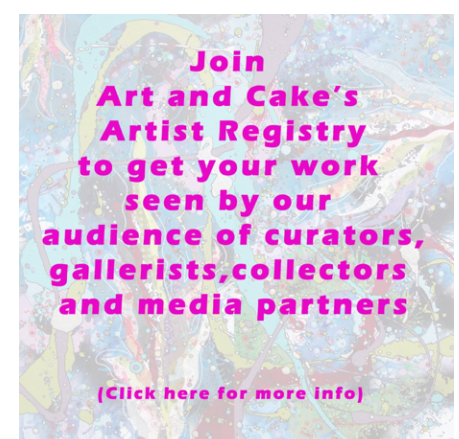


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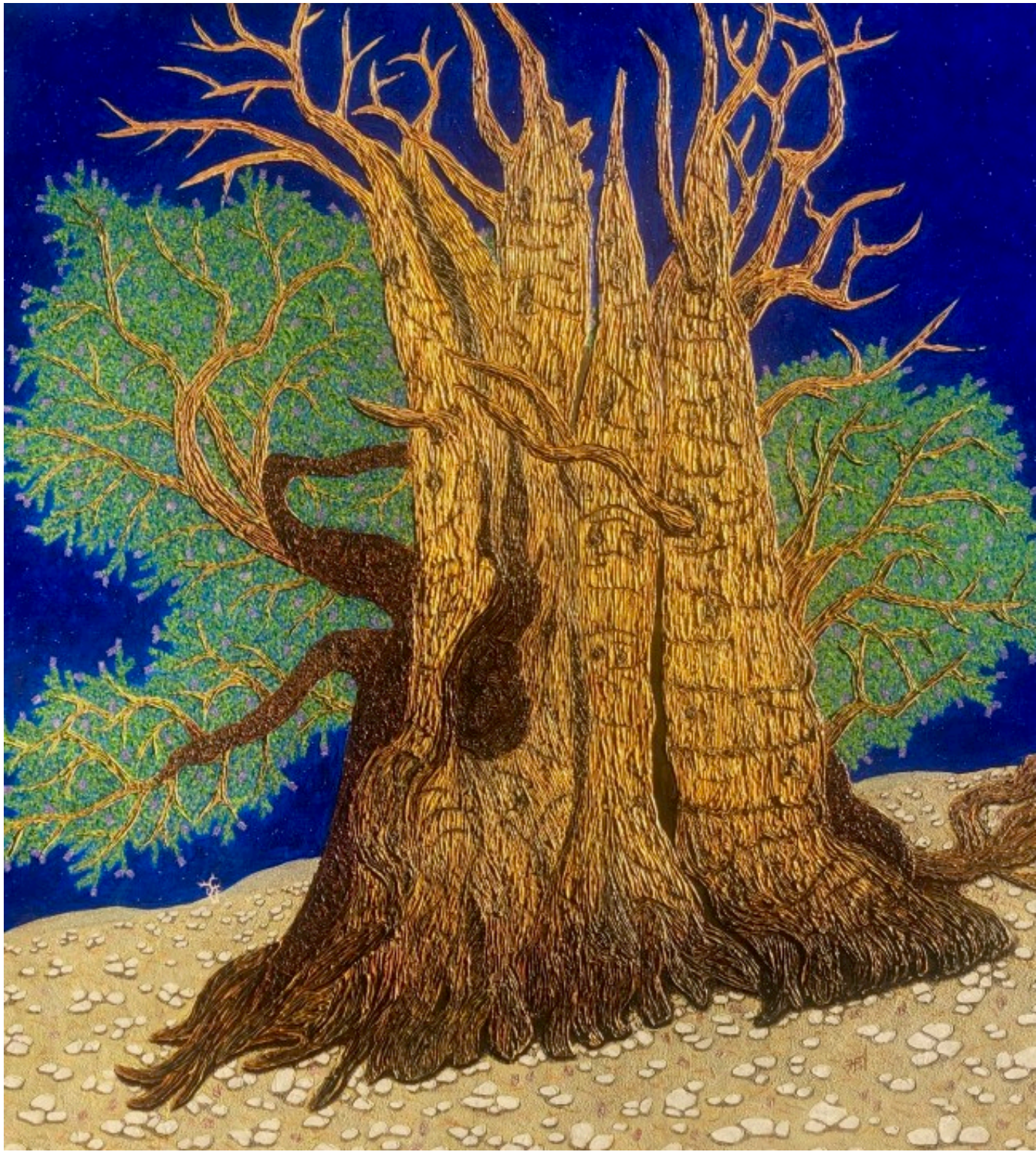


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eyes of the spirit wide open” (to quote Lawrence Durrell) and translates his vision into the color, form, and gestural intensity of his expressive paintings.



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Published by Author

Kristine Schomaker is a new media and performance artist, painter and art historian living and working at the Brewery artist complex in Los Angeles. For over 14 years she has been working with various interdisciplinary art forms including online virtual worlds to explore identity and the hybridization of digital media with the physical world. Whether virtual or physical, the object-based work Kristine creates combines elements of color-based gestural abstraction, animation, pattern and design, neo-Baroque and Populence. Using installation, text, photography, mixed media, video and performance for her ongoing conceptual project My Life as an Avatar, she visualizes a narrative/dialogue with her virtual persona, Gracie Kendal. Kristine then documents her experiences on her blog. In 2012, exploring ideas of community, Kristine turned a local gallery into a modern day creation of Gertrude Stein’s salon of the 1920’s with a live mixed-reality dinner party merging the physical world with the online virtual world. Over the summer she also performed The Bald and the Beautiful in which she had her head shaved as a statement to challenge society’s standards of beauty. Currently, Kristine is working as an Artist-in-Residence through the Linden Endowment for the Arts creating an immersive virtual environment which she is planning to bring into the physical world via sculpture/public art work. [View all posts by Author](#)

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