

élan

CELEBRATING THE ARTS | JULY 2015



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July 2015

COMPOSERS' SHOWCASE | CHRISTENSEN | FLORIMONTE | GALLAGHER | SHENEFELT



On the cover: "Birdhouse #2," oil on wood, 13" w x 18"d x 24"h, by Heidi Christensen; see page 32

Above: "Tulips," photograph, 24" x 32", by Terri Parent; see Calendar, page 20

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WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Transformation

BECOMING A CONDUIT FOR CREATIVITY

"There are painters who transform the sun to a yellow spot, but there are others who with the help of their art and their intelligence, transform a yellow spot into sun."

—Pablo Picasso

What is it that drives the creative spirit? Over the years, many of our profile subjects have revealed their "aha" moments, recalling the personal epiphanies as well as the influences and teachers that have shaped them as artists. And what a gift their stories are for those of us who feel compelled to paint, sculpt, write, act or make music—through their successes and failures, their inspirations and false starts, we are reminded that creativity is inherent within us.

Once again, we have assembled an impressive roster

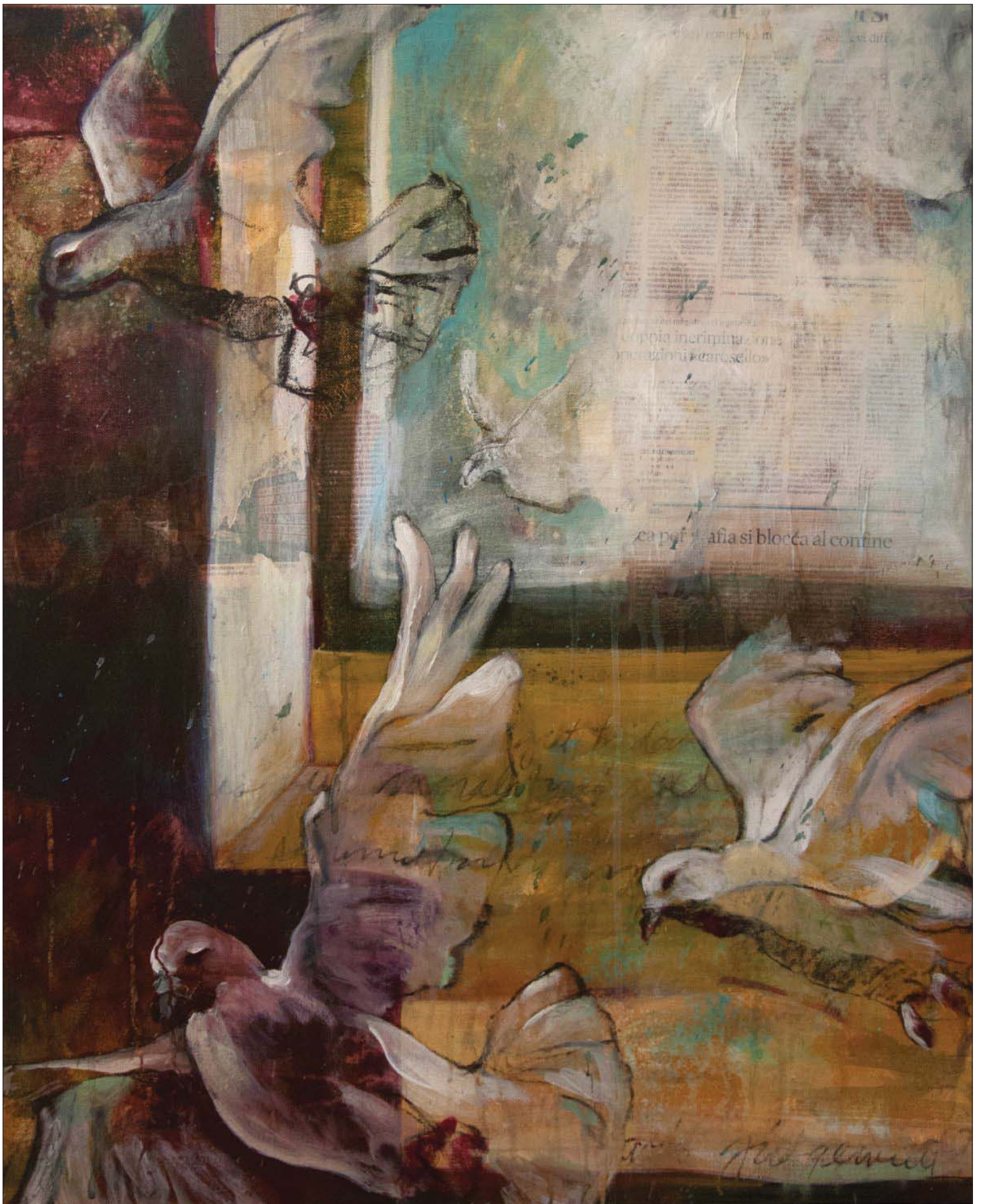
of individuals who generously share their insights and memories. Painter Seana Gallagher revisits the image and the venue that launched her artistic journey; Elaine Florimonte reveals the inspiration behind the signature windows in her mixed media works; and Heidi Christensen recalls the fresh direction her work took after a visit to another artist's studio.

From the performing arts arena, we'll meet actor/writer/producer Michael Shenefelt, who continues to find encouragement in the advice of a high school drama teacher. We'll also hear from five young composers, who convey the eagerness and enthusiasm with which they set out to create a commissioned work. And finally, this month's *Slice of Life* essay celebrates the sensory power of summer peaches.

Carpe diem.

—AN

"Shells Study," (detail), watercolor, gouache, pencil, 7" x 15" by Heidi Christensen; see page 32





ARTIST ELAINE FLORIMONTE

Layers

THE KNOWLEDGE OF ABSTRACTION
BY NATALIA MEGAS



Elaine Florimonte

Above, left: "Seven Years Tall," acrylic on panel, 24" x 24"; and "A Sweetness in the Air," acrylic on panel, 24" x 24"

Opposite: "Awake My Soul," acrylic on panel, 18" x 24"

For painter Elaine Florimonte, art is a language. It's "the voice of my expression," she says, a means by which she can illustrate the layers of emotion and the human condition.

"For years, I have been illustrating moments in time and consciousness through the subconscious meeting of the formal [art] elements being manipulated and the emotional issues that affect me as an artist," she says. "Art is like that fabric of a life, all minute decisions and conversations...that builds the fiber of relationship.... There are layers of paint, and some is opaque and some is transparent. And that creates an accumulation."

Elaine's *Painting a Day*, 2014 series, in which remnants of old newspapers, stamps and other items that define us peek through colorful splashes of paint, exemplifies her metaphorical view of surfaces and layers. She sees her images as "the overlapping of one life on another, the transparency of the actions and words of people."

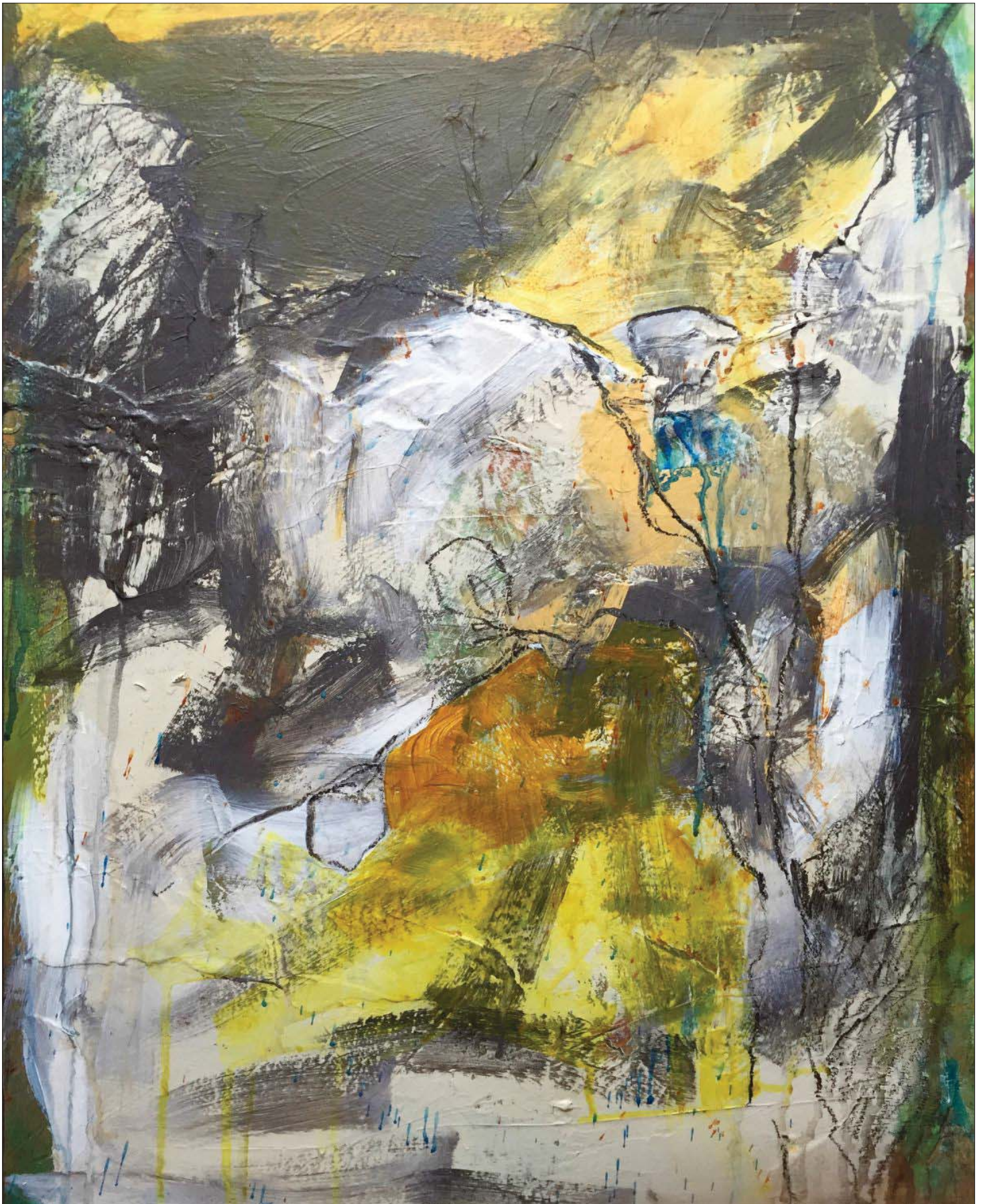
Her surfaces are also distinctive for their use of texture. "Not only is the content of each piece important, but so is the tactile surface," says Elaine. "I want viewers

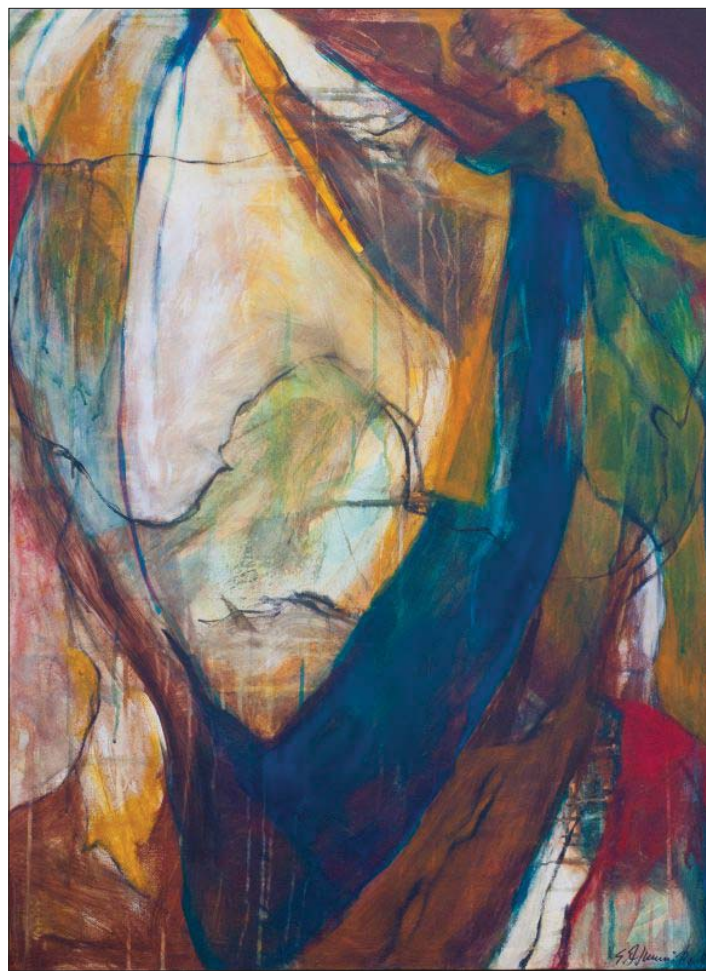
to draw close to my work as a way to connect with the image before them."

Elaine grew up in Vienna and, like most children, enjoyed art, but it wasn't until high school when she took an art class that it became a life-changing force. "Before then, I never identified with art," she says, recalling that she watched her teacher work on his own art in a very open and free environment. "I was like, 'Wow, I can do that!'"

Art changed Elaine's view of the world, she says: "You're going through your education and doing what you're told and all of a sudden, in some process, you see the world and you see space instead of things. You see sense and value in everything. If I could do one thing for the rest of my life, it would be painting—it's never boring."

Elaine earned her Bachelor of Science degree in art education and a master's in fine art in two-dimensional media from Radford University. After college, she focused on graphic design and computer graphics until she grew tired of working with computers. Since 2005, she has taught art in the Fairfax County Public Schools.





She currently creates works in acrylic, mixed media and collage. If pressed to label her artwork, it would be abstract. But she's returning to figurative painting, something that was a part of her artistic foundation, this time "with the knowledge of abstraction."

Elaine's process begins with realistic imagery inspired by nature. The images change throughout the creative process as she experiments with layers, color combinations and overlapping lines. "An old image is lost, but a new one emerges," she says.

Music often sets the mood in the space, says Elaine. "Maybe it distracts me and I make more intuitive choices—less calculated decisions," she says. "If you think it over too much, then it looks contrived and formulaic, but if you do it more intuitively, it's got a freedom to it. "There Were Angels in the Architecture," a mixed media work inspired by the lyrics of the Paul Simon song, "You Can Call Me Al," features a combination of abstraction, window imagery and layers.

Elaine often thinks of the ways in which art parallels life: "Two people who meet—even if it's at the bus stop for 10 minutes and then move on—are changed by that meeting. It could be for the good or the bad, or it could be completely inconsequential until two years later. I think it's the same with painting—you put [layers down], and then you have to figure out what you want to do with them and where you want to go."

Elaine's encounter with the paintings of Andrew Wyeth, particularly those that incorporate windows, had a lasting impression on her. "It was like I got hit by lightning," she says. Now she employs windows in her own work to represent the idea of "looking forward or beyond," she says. The tree branches, which are sometimes seen through the windows, convey light and patterns of light and capture "change that is temporal."

Mark making is another signature element of Elaine's works. "People come into our lives and leave a mark on us," she says. She strives to create paintings that serve as "a reckoning of those marks." She is also influenced by the color theory of Paul Cézanne, something she was immersed in during a painting class in Provence several years ago.

Elaine advises aspiring artists to work every day. "Do the work," she says, "even if you go into your studio and make a mess. You can't start a masterpiece without putting a line down."

Elaine, an art educator and department chair at Westfield High School in Chantilly, is one of 13 regional artists participating in a juried show, July 16 through August 22, at the Greater Reston Arts Center (GRACE) in Reston. Her works also can be seen at Touchstone Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Elaine Florimonte | www.elaineflorimonte.com

"Not only is the content of each piece important, but so is the tactile surface. I want viewers to draw close to my work as a way to connect with the image before them."

—Elaine Florimonte

Above, left: "There Were Angels in the Architecture," acrylic on panel, 18" x 24"; and "My Wings Have Gotten Sore Large," acrylic on canvas, 24" x 36"

Opposite: "I Can See City Lights," acrylic collage on panel, 18" x 24"