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Artist feature: Anne Yoch Russell

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Artist Anne Yoch Russell works on one of her disaster-inspired paintings. She has paintings of explosions over water, of icecaps melting and shipwrecks, many of which grew out of sequences of repetitive nightmares.

This is another in an ongoing series of features on local artists whose work is featured at the Daily Local's MediaLab room.

You can't miss artist Anne Yoch Russell's paintings—they are large format and have a bold, graphic quality, seeming to seethe with vibrant color. But that seething quality is more than just intense design. "I'm currently at work on a series of paintings dealing with natural disasters," says Yoch Russell, "disasters caused by mankind on the earth, particularly in seas and waterways."

She is keenly aware of all the ways we are putting more and more pressure on the Earth and amazed and frightened by our denial of this fact.

Yoch Russell's painting at the Daily Local is, for example, an abstraction of the BP oil spill along the Gulf Coast. She has paintings of explosions over water, of icecaps melting and shipwrecks, many of which grew out of sequences of repetitive nightmares.

"I am trying to explore the tension between the beautiful and the destructive, trying to engage with the mystery of what is taking place beneath the surface, what seeps into and permeates that depth. It's a strange thing to beautify disaster," she says, "but that seems to be what I am drawn to."

Yoch Russell is, as well, an accomplished muralist busy with private commissions; recently she completed a mural for Victory Brewing Co. at the P.J. Whelihan's in West Chester.

Interestingly, Yoch Russell began her artistic career as a photographer at Tyler School of Art. She went on to receive her MFA in painting from the San Francisco Art Institute. "I was scared of painting at first," says Yoch Russell. Now, it seems, most of her work is oriented around painting—even her art installations seem like paintings translated into three dimensions. "By painting these sculpted shapes and installing them within a certain space, I feel I am 'animating' my paintings," she says.

Yoch Russell sees herself as an "emerging artist" who relishes experimenting with everything from wood carving, to throwing clay, to macrophotography—recently—which uses repeated and turned images. These images may stand on their own as photographs, but Yoch Russell envisions, as well, their being used as jumping off points for her paintings. Yoch Russell finds that working with and experiencing such a wide range of materials keeps her art fresh and lively. "I am always trying to learn as much as possible all the time," she says.

At some point she's very interested in mounting an exhibition of her work in all media, to see how these disparate works hold together and how thematic elements intersect.

Yoch Russell's work has been part of exhibitions in California, Pennsylvania, and Mexico. She teaches a wide range of art classes locally and is currently the art teacher for grades 7-12 at The Woodlynde School in Wayne.

For more information on Anne Yoch Russell's artwork and murals, visit www.anneyochrussell.com

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