

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

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Rolling in the Deep at Kenise Barnes Fine Art

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Established in 1994, Kenise Barnes Fine Art is one of Westchester County's best and brightest galleries. Ms. Barnes' current exhibit, *Rolling in the Deep*, offers a nice overview of the medium of encaustic painting with four notable hot wax practitioners Christine Aaron, Cecile Chong, Lorraine Glessner and Joanne Mattera.

Cecile Chong has been exposed to a diverse spectrum of cultures having spent various parts of her life in Ecuador, China and the U.S. Her art, which mostly draws from her Asian or biological roots, first appears to be rather traditional, familiar and banal. Upon closer inspection, you begin to see such things as symbols of heavily swaddled babies set out on various branches making reference to her Latin roots, or little computer parts buried here and there that are meant as a nod to the current day and a whole new understanding of her iconography emerges. I especially enjoy looking at the thickness of her applications of encaustic, a somewhat malleable substance that in Chong's hands can, when needed, be built up into small mounds of candy-colored rock-like formations. The rich, thick surface and the ability to embed tiny objects that can be seen 'floating' within is at the core of her art, and as a somewhat soft and susceptible material to heat, it can also be carved, cut, burned or etched into as Chong uses to great effect, when she punctuates key edges with incised line.

Christen Aaron uses very little wax. Instead, she relies on the oxidation of copper plates as a main factor of color and texture. Depicting haunting stands of trees accented in strategic spots with handwritten text, Aaron offers what appears to be an afterimage of what one might experience when exposed to harsh light. The text she includes adds a nice bit of intimacy, bringing the experience back to a more comforting and cozy level. Overall, there is a feeling of age or time in the work as if we've stumbled upon a very old photographic plate, or a painting that has been heavily aged, acidified and faded. In "Tree Muse 1" and "Tree Muse 2" (2011), Aaron works on board, adding long strands of hair, photo-transfer and collage beneath lightly tinted encaustic to beef up the visual experience.

The art of Lorraine Glessner has the most universal appeal, which in this instance is a good thing. Glessner's art reminds me quite a bit of Judy Pfaff's works on paper, as there are many layers of coalescing and contrasting segues. With Glessner, we see a cornucopia of elements and techniques that draw you in like the smell of a delicious meal when hungry. When you nose up to her work, horse and human hair, thin ink scrolls, rust stained silk and geometrically shaped raised surfaces come into view in successive volleys. In one piece, "Burn Baby Burn" (2012), there is an area of tightly scribbled patterns and spirals at one end of a long, sinuous, embedded horsehair that immediately brings to mind the fanciful details in an Aubrey Beardsley drawing.

Joanne Mattera, in addition to being a marvelous non-objective artist, has written one of the most complete books on the topic of encaustic painting titled *The Art of Encaustic Painting: Contemporary Expression in the Ancient Medium of Pigmented Wax*. For this exhibition, Ms. Barnes has selected three works that have, for the most part, the texture of the wax and the various opacity or densities of color obtainable with encaustic painting as the main subject. "Coming up For Air" (2012) is a testament to the command that she has for her medium. Using a coarsely bristled brush and applying very straight bands of color that waver between precisely taped edges and carefully painted ones sans the tape, Mattera creates a hypnotic blend of visuals that is at once uplifting and calming. I also love the witty title that to me, references both the use of a respirator to avoid the noxious fumes the melting encaustic delivers when prepped for application, and the transitions of color one might experience while snorkeling in a pristine coral sea.

Yes, there are still a few excellent galleries in Westchester County where you can get away from the shopping and the car culture, the soccer games and the commuting and refresh your spirit with intriguing visual art.