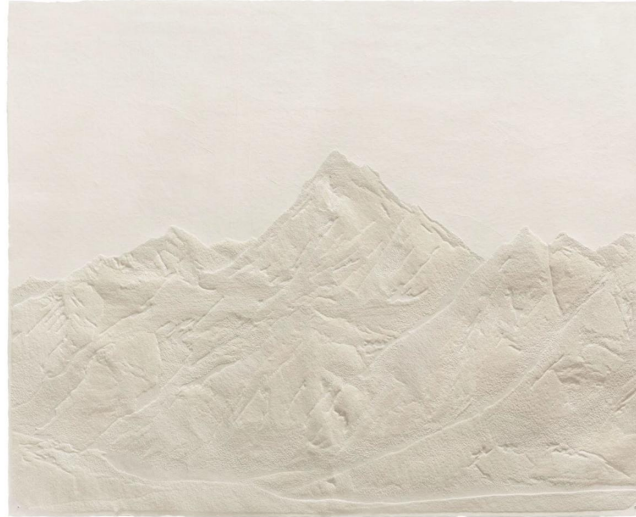


Brownfield artists stop time in its tracks

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Rich Anderson

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It takes a lot of time to capture a moment.

For a photographer it takes the click of a camera shutter, but also the painstaking process of developing the film and printing the image.

For a painter it can take weeks or months or even years to render a scene with oils on canvas.

For Jackson Hole encaustic artist Pamela Gibson it took layer after layer of pigmented beeswax that she then scraped away, eroding it away like wind and rain erodes stone to form arches and cliffs and alpine tarns.

And for Chinese artist Fu Xiaotong it took precisely 234,296 pinpricks to incise in exacting detail a mountainscape into heavy handmade paper.

Gibson and Fu will be featured at Shari Brownfield Fine Art, at 55 S. Glenwood Ave., for the 2021 Fall Arts Festival.

“I wanted to do something that reflects the spirit of our landscapes,” art advisor-gallerist Brownfield said, “but that isn’t quite so obvious.”

Brownfield doesn’t represent artists the way a traditional gallery does.

“Traditional galleries help create the artists’ career — market them, have shows,” she said.

“As an art advisor, rather than being the channel for the artists I’m a channel for the client. I get them what they want, know the trends, learn what the art story is for the specific family.”

After operating her consultancy out of a home office for about six years, she wanted a physical presence, a place to reflect all of her interests and abilities, and a way to be part in the energetic downtown scene. She opened her new space in the little log cabin around the corner from Pearl Street Bagels in March 2020, converting it into an office, a viewing room and a place to showcase artists. Shortly thereafter, however, when the coronavirus pandemic forced much of the economy to slam its doors shut, she moved back to her home office.

“We did not know how the art world would be affected,” she said. Things were quiet for some time, but then the big auction houses — Sotheby’s, Christie’s, Phillips — figured out how to do what they do online and became “these mega online galleries,” Brownfield said. “And suddenly, with their wide reach, there was an enormous influx of new clients.”

Many were younger people, people comfortable shopping for art online and clicking “buy” without have seen the work in person. The old masters market died down, but the contemporary and secondary markets fired up, along with socially aware art and artists — female artists and LGBTQ artists who had long been marginalized or outright ignored, who had had a huge impact in art history but had never fetched the prices they deserved.

“A lot of people were at home,” she said. “Some of them were bored, some were looking around to be inspired. ... We saw a lot of people escaping to the mountains and creating spaces for themselves that they hadn’t really thought about before.”

Which is exactly when they need the unique skills and connections of an art advisor.

“I happen to have been trained in this,” Brownfield said. “So it was an exciting moment, when beauty was appreciated and the value established in different art genres, rather than the same 50 white guys at the top of the art market list. It ended up being a very good year.”

Brownfield moved back to Glenwood in early summer 2020, marking the reopening with an exhibit for Gibson.

“She’s a patron of the arts, an artists — creative, thoughtful, has served on many nonprofits. I didn’t know what to expect,” but the show nearly sold out. “Again, it was about people slowing down, people appreciating ... and her work so much about slowing down time, capturing moments and then reliving them.”

Inspired by the seasons and the change of seasons, Gibson’s encaustics are full of colors that evoke a sense of time and place. “Next,” a 30-by-72 inch triptych, is saturated with late-summer greens, with some jewel-like shapes drooping from above, like the first signs of autumn imposing on the verdure. It could be a Tiffany glasswork or a Monet water lily canvas or even a garden where Klimt might have set a tryst.

Other works are quieter, more empty, leaving space for the viewer to write their own story. Speaking of which, in some work Gibson will incorporate writing into the medium, “but she doesn’t want us to know what it says,” so after creating her scene, she will go back to scrape

some of her work away, revealing layers that had been covered up, and leaving just a hint of the words that were there, like something “barely recalled,” Brownfield said.

Fu’s work is rich with stories and connections: The paper she uses is heavy handmade paper traditionally used for calligraphy and printing.

“It’s very strong, flexible and pliable,” Brownfield said.

Working from photographs and small studies she embarks on the epic journey of depicting traditional Chinese subject matter — ocean waves and mountain peaks — as well as some more abstract forms using a needle.

“She writes that there are five ways to pierce paper,” Brownfield said. “From the front, from the back, a slash right, a slash left and to emboss.”

The tens of thousands of piercings and slashing add up to incredibly detailed and dimensioned images that have an uncanny way of changing as the light in the room changes.

“Her use of the needle also relates to traditional female roles,” Brownfield said, “embroidery and silk as opposed to the more scholarly traditional painting of the male dominated art world.”

Brownfield said that she looks at the work of both women, “so much of it is about capturing moments ... capturing moments into an eternal now. Both artists’ work is about how fluid time is, how their mediums stop time when they are working. Pam, taking wax in solid form and changing it to liquid then a solid again and then scraping through the layers, she’s going back in time.

“And here’s Fu, working in this medium that takes precision, meditation and concentration. ... In her work, it’s like a vision,” she said.

“Although these are not what we usually see in Jackson in landscape work, I think it fits in so well to how we live here, this retreat to the mountains, a quieter life or a more thoughtful life in nature. It’s how I react to these artists and how I hope the audience will react to it — to connect it to a place, a sense of place, so the space will feel like a sanctuary outside that frantic energy that we live in day to day.”

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