

ARTIST OF THE MONTH / REBECCA SHAPIRO

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Q & A WITH REBECCA SHAPIRO & GALLERY DIRECTOR LAURA MORIARTY

LM: *I like the way your compositions seem to float. Can you talk about the play between abstraction and representation in your work?*

RS: My art career began as an illustrator and printmaker so representation is inherent in my work; lines are essential. At the same time, my work is experiential and metaphorical. This is where abstraction comes into play. I like the tension between the desire to draw what I see and the desire to simply extract the essence of my subject.

To start a piece, I usually draw a line somewhere on the paper or board. My favorite way to start is with a blind contour drawing. The line provides a framework on which to build the composition while I add form and color. When I'm working with watercolor or encaustic, I'm very partial to transparent glazes. Painting this way is quite sculptural as I build the piece layer by layer, resulting in a rich depth and the impression that pieces of the composition are floating.

LM: *Are you still spiraling?*

RS: I am still spiraling but with a twist. Last fall I was studying Indian Tantric art, a religious, contemplative practice. Most of the art is made of very simple forms, using basic colors, revealing the energies and essences of life and spirit. The images are used to recall and re-enter a state of meditation throughout the day.

I played with the fixed center point of the spiral as a metaphor for my life, a place of stillness, a new beginning or a final conclusion. The spiral lines that widen or tighten around this point became a path I traveled: contraction or expansion, introspection or emptiness, growth or hibernation.

After a year of spiraling, I am now exploring the beliefs and behaviors that bind me. I'm very interested in unwinding things like knotted string, old rubber golf balls, tangled yarn. This has me exploring ways to untangle the constricted self. In addition to encaustic, mixed media, installation and video offer new avenues to pursue new concepts and creative endeavors.

LM: *How do your environmental concerns play out in your studio?*

RS: Since high school, there have been several times where I hurt myself in the studio. Twice, I've inhaled paint solvents in a poorly ventilated room and once in college I burned my lungs with a toxic cloud of chlorine while working in the serigraphy studio. There really wasn't good information out there about materials safety except people saying "don't do that." When you're

ARTIST OF THE MONTH



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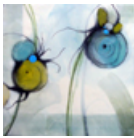
young, you don't give those warnings much weight until you're hurting. There's quite a bit of information about materials safety these days like Monona Rossol's book "The Artist's Complete Health and Safety Guide." Now, I strive for safe and sustainable practices in my studio from making sure I have proper ventilation to cautious use of pigments, especially with encaustic. I'm mindful about how I dispose of materials and I choose water-based mediums, using as few solvents as possible. When teaching, my students know what they can safely do with their materials and what precautions they need to take to ensure the health of their own bodies and the environment.

I'm also interested in making my own art materials and that led me to become a beekeeper several years ago. I wanted to harvest my own wax to use in encaustic. While I use filtered beeswax, I like unfiltered beeswax when mixing whites because it creates a softer, more natural white. In turn, this helped me develop an even deeper appreciation for my own health and our environment and how to reduce waste and reuse my materials.

LM: *What projects are on the horizon for you?*

RS; I just completed a round of grant applications and am waiting to hear the results of whether my project has been funded. Grants are a good financial resource for supporting my studio practice. While I don't always receive a grant, I appreciate the process. It helps me get clear and articulate what I'm doing in my work. It also helps me refine and deepen my concepts. I'm delving further into the work with knots and tangles. I want to make some sculptural pieces with encaustic and have just begun using video to document my ideas. At the same time, I've been finding myself drawn to rivers and oceans. I suspect they represent the flow and velocity of movement and freedom once a knot has been released. I'm excited to be trekking in this direction.

Finally, I've been invited to create a large-scale installation and give a 10 minute TED talk about my art and the installation for the TEDx Concordia University event next March in Portland. This event is the perfect catalyst and venue to make a large-scale piece I've dreamed of creating for a couple of years. I started doing installation work in 2009 and really enjoy the process. There's an exciting tension between conceptualization and the moment the piece is revealed to the public. My installations are typically designed so the viewer can interact with the piece. I'm excited that the TEDx theme is about velocity and taking action because it is in concert with the evolution of my work and studio practice.



ARTIST BIO

Rebecca was born in Portland, OR and spent her teenage years in Houston, TX where she learned graphic design and medical illustration at the University of Texas Medical School. She holds a bachelor's degree in Studio Art from Smith College in Northampton, MA, where she worked with noted photographer Carl Chiarenza and printmaker Dwight Pogue. She studied photography and printmaking at the Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and was a five time recipient of the Frank Freed Memorial Scholarship for Printmaking. She worked for several years with figurative abstractionist, Ted Katz, in Portland, Oregon concentrating on abstract painting. In addition, she launched an arts integration program in 2009 at the Creative Science School (K-8) in Portland, OR where she is currently the Program Director.

Rebecca's paintings and installations have been shown in solo and group shows throughout Oregon, Washington and Massachusetts since 1998. Her works hang in private and public collections in Massachusetts, Washington, New York, Oregon, Texas and New Zealand. An active participant online, Ms. Shapiro's art and methodology has also been written about in green business publications and art blogs. Her work is currently represented by DragonFire Studio and Gallery in Cannon Beach, OR.

Thanks to an informed childhood in the Pacific Northwest, Rebecca strives for sustainable practices in her studio and chooses earth friendly materials that express her love of nature. Her studio is also Recycle at Work Certified through the City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability.

[Click here](#) to visit Rebecca's website.



ARTIST STATEMENT

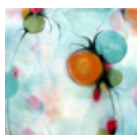
One touch of nature makes the whole world kin. ~ William Shakespeare

Plants inspire me to explore and record my kinship with nature. Vibrant colors, dynamic lines and soft shadows provide a wild braid of inspiration. The blend of aromas and textures engage my senses. Through the seasons plants serve the cycles of growth, death and regeneration. I witness their evolution from seed to plant to fruit or flower and back to seed with quiet symmetry and grace. I find respite and purpose in this reverent flow of life. Plants wrap me in a deeper reality. It is from this place that I paint.

I create abstract paintings using natural materials: dammar resin, beeswax and pigments. This ancient recipe, also known as encaustic, has been used for thousands of years. Renowned for luminosity and depth, encaustic also produces little waste as the wax is reused. Thus, my paintings share a common DNA like seeds borne from a mother plant.

I keep my own bees, harvest my own wax and render my own honey. I find a satisfying unity between the plants that inspire me, the bees that pollinate them and the beeswax in my medium. Lines are essential to my work as I use them to create a path, set a boundary or connect forms together. Each painting begins as a blind contour drawing. I simplify or enhance plant parts, focusing on delicate veins, jagged leaves or sinuous vines, honing in on impression and mood. Onto this foundation, I add shape, infuse color and build surface until a luminous harmony is achieved. Hot layers of wax are quickly applied by brush and a blowtorch is used to move forms and soften edges while in a liquid state. My chief aim is abstraction so the essence of my subject lingers.

For the last five years I have found my muse exclusively in plants. Now, deeper questions and influences about relationships to myself, others and our environment are emerging in my work. I seek inspiration, materials and methods that help me delve deeper into these concepts, always circling back to the theme of kinship.



RESUME

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS (*SOLO)

2011-current, Dragonfire Gallery, Cannon Beach, OR: <http://bit.ly/p29PSqj>
 2012, 23rd Annual Arts Evening and Auction, Cascade AIDS Project, Portland, OR (installation)
 2012, Come to Your Senses, Portland Center for the Performing Arts, Portland, OR
 2011, Stormy Weather Art Festival, DragonFire Gallery, Cannon Beach, OR
 2011, 22nd Annual Art Evening and Auction, Cascade AIDS Project, Portland, OR
 2010, Wild Arts Festival, Audubon Society of Portland, Portland, OR
 2010, Gifted, Littman Gallery, PSU, Portland, OR
 2010*, Select Works, Graeter Art, Portland, OR
 2010, Luminous Layers, Lake Oswego Festival of the Arts, Lake Oswego, OR
 2010, Cooley House Art Show, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, OR
 2010, An Artist a Day, Muse Art + Design, Portland, OR
 2010, Rainy Day Wildfire, Portland City Art + Regional Arts & Culture Council, Portland, OR
 2010, Real Lives of Women Artists, Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA
 2009*, SEE, The Manor of Art, Portland City Art @ Milepost 5, Portland, OR, (installation)
 2009, 20th Annual Art Evening and Auction, Cascade AIDS Project, Portland, OR
 2006*, Haiga and Haiku, Local Color, Seattle, WA
 2003, A Retrospective, Gavin Shettler Gallery, Portland, OR
 2003, Abstract Show, PICA, Portland, OR
 2001*, Narrative Anatomy, Gavin Shettler Gallery, Portland, OR
 2001, Abstract Show, Robert Canaga Gallery, Eugene, OR
 2000, The Lake Oswego Arts Chronicle, Lake Oswego, OR
 2000*, Haiku Winter, Smith College Gallery, Smith College, Northampton, MA
 1998, Studio 200 Show, Brian Marki Fine Art, Portland, OR

AWARDS

2011, Project Grant, Multnomah County Cultural Coalition, CSS, Portland, OR
2010, Professional Development Grant, Regional Art and Culture Council, Portland, OR
1985-1986, Five-time recipient of the Frank Freed Memorial Scholarship for Printmaking, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

2011, "Painters Shapiro, Mish and Pavlenko Now at DragonFire Gallery in Cannon Beach", Coast Explorer, Summer 2011, p. 29 | online: <http://bit.ly/nqAksb>
2011, Ujiri, Lauren, "ArtclecticPDX Jun 26 2011 R Shapiro and D Fox", Artclectic PDX: <http://bit.ly/mS9Dgp>
2010, Haatia, Lorraine, "Shapiro Uses Beeswax to Create Green Art", Greening Business Everyday: <http://bit.ly/diUxEh>
2010, Hawkey, Cameron, "Saturday 4/17/10: Rebecca Shapiro", An Artist a Day: Blog: <http://bit.ly/9Q8c6f>

COLLECTIONS

2000, Smith College, Northampton, MA

OTHER PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

2011, Project Grant Panelist, Arts-In-Schools, Regional Arts & Culture Council, Portland, OR
2010-current, Creative Arts Program Director, Creative Science School, Portland, OR
2009, Business Development Committee, Oregon College of Art and Craft, Portland, OR
2009, Public Speaking: Social Media for Artists, Working Artists Network, Portland, OR
2008-2009, Public Speaking: monthly eco-friendly art segments, AM Northwest, Portland, OR
2008-2009, Curator, Arabella, Portland, OR
2008, Public Speaking: Art and the Drive for Ecological and Human Preservation, Working Artists Network + SAO, Portland, OR
1998-current, Private drawing and painting instruction, Portland, OR.

COMMISSIONS

2011-current, Footloose Enterprises, Cambridge, New Zealand
2008, Eco-Luxury Fur, LLC, Portland, OR

EDUCATION

2010, Artist as Educator Certification, Portland Children's Museum, Portland, OR
1998-2001, Independent study in abstract painting with Ted Katz, Portland, OR
1985, Smith College, Northampton, MA, BA degree in Fine Art
1985, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX

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