

The medium that launched a 1,000-year-old ship

THE ARTISTIC process, for Tracey Adams, is an organic revelation — a spontaneous series of surprises that conspire and collaborate into a finished piece. Those surprises keep her engaged and distract her from life's noise.

"I go to bed at night feeling like I can't wait to get back into my studio the next morning to see what I did the day before," said the former York School educator who specializes in encaustic paintings and collage, descendants of a medium created by the ancient Greeks in the fifth century B.C. as a way to waterproof their ships. Encaustic art, celebrated for its endurance, has been known to survive 1,000 years or longer.

Her process requires mixing beeswax with a damar resin, a tree-sourced hardening sap that gives the combination its longevity. She adds the desired colors using wax-based pigment sticks, then dips

more than a dozen artists, including Ken Hale, Andrea Borsuk, Kirstine Reiner Hansen, Lisa Hochstein, Don Hughes, Jennifer Brook-Kothlow, Chris Leib, Jan Wurm, and Holly and Ashlee Temple.

Adams' paintings also will be part of "Winter Light," a 14-artist show that opens Nov. 13 with an artist reception at Carmel Modern (Sixth Avenue between Dolores and Lincoln).

First music, then art

Her earliest creative interest was music, remembers Adams, who, as a 3-year-old, exuberantly pounded the keys of her toy piano while her parents listened to Lawrence Welk and his orchestra on Saturday night TV.

But art also had its place. At 5, her tempera painting, "Hot Dogs and Arrows," won third place in a local competition.

"I went to summer camp at Big Bear Lake, where I was introduced to the music of Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan, Tim Buckley ... a lot of the anti-war folk singers," said Adams, who grew up in Los Angeles.

After graduating from University High in L.A., Adams studied music at UCLA, then attended New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, earning her master's degree in conducting.

As a graduate student, she worked as an assistant conductor at Northeastern University for two years and served as conductor of the Harvard-Radcliffe University Graduate Chorale.

Studio art became a priority from 1978 to 1980, as she took a series of classes at Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts.

Adams returned to Los Angeles to teach from 1982 to 1987 and then to the Monterey Peninsula, where she taught from 1992 to 1997 at York School.

"York has such lively kids, and I loved teaching them," she said. "I encouraged my students to use their brains to synthesize information, rather than going off to college and regurgitating whatever they

Carmel's Artists

By DENNIS TAYLOR

Japanese paper into that molten encaustic, which is spread on a heated aluminum table.

Adams then tears up those colorful sheets and affixes the fragments to a wooden panel that has been covered with slightly textured Japanese paper made from mulberry fibers and other pulp.

"I'll grab one of those torn pieces and say, 'Hmm ... I wonder how this would look?' and adhere it to the panel. Then I respond to that with the next piece, and that's how the art transforms and develops," she explained.

Galleries and shows

Her eclectic abstract paintings have been represented for 34 years in Carmel by the Winfield Gallery (Dolores between Ocean and Seventh), and some of her most recent work is on exhibit through Nov. 22 at the newest show, "Paper Works," at Carl Cherry Center for the Arts (Fourth and Guadalupe).

That exhibition features the work of

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Carmel artist Tracey Adams specializes in encaustic paintings and collages that will be part of fall exhibitions at Carl Cherry Center and Carmel Modern. Adams has shown her art at Winfield Gallery for 34 years.

PHOTO/DENNIS TAYLOR

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heard. I wanted them to learn to think and put ideas together.”

Until 30 years ago, she was a printmaker and painter working mostly in oil-based media.

“People sometimes would look at my work and say, ‘Oh, is that encaustic?’ And I’d reply, ‘I don’t know what encaustic is,’” said Adams, who, in 1997, journeyed to Kingston, N.Y., to take her first workshop in the medium at R&F Handmade

Paints. That decision would have a significant impact on her artistic future.

Since 2000, her portfolio has included encaustic paintings, collage and drawings — work that has earned extensive acclaim.

Adams’ art has been showcased in more than 175 solo and group exhibitions in the United States and abroad, including shows at the Monterey Museum of Art, Fresno Art Museum, the Andy Warhol Museum in Slovakia, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, and others.

Her work is also in permanent collections at Triton Museum in Santa Clara, Crocker Museum in Sacramento, the Bakersfield Museum of Art, the Tucson

Museum of Art, New Museum Los Gatos and Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and Museum of Contemporary art in Hot Springs, Ark.

Adams has been interviewed in recent years by the Huffington Post, Professional Artist Magazine, The Studio Work, and Geoform, among other publications.

In 2016, she received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, awarded to visual artists based on artistic merit and financial need, to help cover studio expenses, supplies, exhibition costs or other living expenses.

Music and art in concert

Music and art work in concert today whenever she creates.

“I don’t listen to music as I work ... I feel music. It’s just a part of me and, therefore, a part of the art,” she said. “I don’t need to know why or how. It doesn’t have to be quantitative.”

She also is a puzzle enthusiast, solving many of the New York Times puzzles every morning before she gets out of bed.

“I do the crossword, Strands, the Spelling Bee, Wordle ... all of that,” Adams said. “As a collage artist, I see my work as puzzles waiting to be configured and solved.”

Adams also teaches Pilates classes — private and “duets” — at Body Movement Pilates in Monterey.

“I enjoy it very much,” she said. “Art can be lonely and solitary, which is fine — I love that part of it — but I also need to connect with people,” she said.

For more information and to view images of her work, visit traceyadamsart.com, or on Instagram @traceyadamsart.

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