

Mixing It Up -

Using Photography, Oil Painting, Collage, and Encaustic Together

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I have always been interested in using multiple processes in my work to get the effect that I want. I have taken photographs since in my early twenties but in the last 10 years some of these photos are showing up in my work. I studied painting at the San Francisco Art Institute in the mid 90's. My current work starts with a photograph, and then I add oil paint and the last step is the addition of encaustic. The photo ends up being the focal point. I paint the backgrounds with oil paint. I add the encaustic as a glaze and to give it a dreamlike quality. I like the combination that plays with the idea of what is real and what is not.

My current series of work is called *Altered Reality*. It is a melding of still life, landscape and surrealism. These works are about contrasts and differences; they are playful and dream-like. I like putting together odd and ordinary things. I also like the merging of the photos into the paint. It is a way to emphasize what is real and what is not.



Wildfire #2, Mixed Media/Archival Print/Oil Painting/Encaustic, 18 x 18 inches, 2011

Wildfire was inspired by the current drought in the high desert where I live. I was taking my morning walk and things were extremely dry. The grass areas looked like you could breathe on them and start a fire. The nest is a symbol for new life. Fire is part of the cycle of life. This piece won Best of Show at the EAI National Juried Encaustic Exhibition.

Caged Dilemma is a piece that plays with the idea of being wild and being domesticated. In Indian culture they speak of living in the fourth world and coming from the third world. The sky in the bottom of the cage could be the portal to the third world. This piece won the Judge Award at the Insight Women in Photography Exhibit.



Caged Dilemma, Mixed Media/Archival Print/Oil Painting/Encaustic, 24 x 24 inches, 2011

Now, I will give a detailed explanation of my process.

Step 1: First I start by taking lots of photographs. My work is based on still lives so I start by doing set ups in the studio. I shoot with a Nikon D200 camera and have it set for the highest resolution possible. The camera produces raw format digital photos that I then work with in Photoshop.

Step 2: Once I have loaded the photos into my computer I quickly scan all of them looking for images that I think are dynamic. Those that are selected are then edited in Photoshop to adjust the exposure and contrast until I get them to look the way that I want. Once I'm satisfied, I print them out on archival paper or if they are too large for my printer I send them out to a professional digital printer. In either case the prints are archival quality. I like to print on photo quality rag paper that is acid free. That sort of paper is like a watercolor paper and holds the ink well. My favorite paper to print on is Moab Entrada Rag Bright 190. It is 100% cotton paper.



Step 2

Step 3: I do quite a bit of prep work to the photograph before I start to work on it. I need to protect the paper and ink from the oil paint to preserve the photo. First I spray the photo with Krylon UV-Resistant Acrylic Coating, gloss to protect the image from the UV light. Once sprayed on, I let it dry at least a day before I start working it on. You will want to spray the photo in a well ventilated area because of the fumes from the spray.

Once dry then I put four coats of Golden Polymer Medium gloss, letting it dry between coats. This is done to protect the image from the oil paint. I apply each coat in four different directions: up, across, diagonal, and then diagonal the other direction. I do this to give the surface an even texture.



Step 3

Step 4: If I am going to add any collage pieces to the work this is when I do that. I use the Golden medium to glue pieces down. This could be done in Photoshop but I prefer cutting images out and then placing them on to the photo.



Step 4

Step 5: To prepare the panel I tape the edge with masking tape to protect it from the glue and wax. Once the work is dry, I glue it down onto a panel. I use Talus Jade Glue #403 to do this. It is an acid-free glue that bookmakers and book restorers use. I like this glue because it adheres well to the panel and I don't get air pockets between the paper and panel. I do not trim the piece to the exact size until the piece is glued down on the panel. I usually cut one edge to the correct size to use as a guide of where the piece is to go on the panel. I coat the backside of the photo and the front of the panel with glue. Once sandwiched together, I use a roller to burnish down the piece and to get out excess glue and air pockets. I like to use wax paper over the piece to protect it from any glue when burnishing it down. I start in the middle and then roll out. I then wipe the edges once the photo is all glued down. I then lay the piece face down, stack it with weights (I use books to weight it down) and let it dry for a day. Once dry, I trim the edges of excess paper.



Step 5

Step 6: Once everything is glued down and dry, I paint a layer of oil medium on the work and let it dry for at least a day. The oil medium gives the work some tooth. That helps the oil paint and the encaustic medium to stick to the work. I use Daniel Smith Painting Medium for Oils.



Step 6

Step 7: Once the medium is dry I use oil paint to paint the background. The backgrounds are either of an interior space or outdoor landscape space. I like to paint the backgrounds of my work because of the contrast between the photography and the painting. I like the idea of what is real and what is not.



Step 7

Step 8: Once everything is dry I start to apply the encaustic medium. I make my own medium from bees wax and damar resin crystals. I use the medium as a glaze. I use Pharmaceutical-grade beeswax. It is the clearest filtered wax available. The medium needs to be heated on a hot plate until it reaches a liquid state. Once it has reached that state I brush it all over the piece making sure that it is thoroughly covered.



Step 8

Step 9: Once the encaustic medium has been applied, I burn it in with a heat gun. I heat the whole area at once, making sure there are no bubbles or ridges forming in the wax. I find it easiest to see bubbles if I look at it from an angle.



Step 9

Step 10: Once the piece has cooled, I scrape away any thick areas in the wax medium with a tool used in ceramics.



Step 10

Step 11: I also like to draw into the wax. My favorite tool is a sharpened chopstick. It allows me to make small thin lines into the wax medium.



Step 11

Step 12: Once I draw in the lines, I like to fill these lines with oil paint mixed with medium. You first fill the lines with the pigment mixture and rub the mixture into the lines. A palette knife works well and so does the edge of an old credit card.



Step 12

Step 13: Then you wipe away the top layer leaving the pigment in the lines. If there is more of the pigment on the top than you like, I will sometimes wipe it further with the clear oil medium.



Step 13

Step 14: It takes at least a day for the lines to dry. Once dry I like to further embed and move the lines around a little and possible break them up, so I heat the wax again with the heat gun and move them around with air flow of the gun.



Step 14

Step 15: Once the piece has cooled and I like the way it has turned out, I polish the piece with a smooth cloth. I also remove the blue masking tape that I use to protect the edges from the wax. I then photograph the finished piece for documentation. The finished piece is pictured on the left.



Step 15



Fly Away #2, Mixed Media, Archival Photo, Collage, Oil Painting, Encaustic, 12 x 12 inches, 2013