

Grapevine

ART · CULTURE · FOOD · WINE

Su Sheedy

by Cindy Mark



Su Sheedy, based in Kingston, ON, has been a full-time encaustic artist since 2001. As a material-based artist, she enjoys mixing encaustic with other mediums: pressed tin, carded wool, corrugated steel and birch bark, to name just a few. Texture is her subject matter, and narrative markings result from pouring, routing or persistent scraping gestures. Often relying upon the grid as her structure, a profusion of repeated forms, strokes and textures result in what could be described as “tactile expressionism.” Grapevine caught up with Su and asked her the following:

Q: You cite Paterson Ewen and Cy Twombly as artistic influences. Why?

A: I tend to gravitate toward work which is textural, has loose gestural freedom and which brings the “process of art making” into the mind’s eye. Cy Twombly’s work is expressive, physical, urgent, repetitive and self-conscious. The material he works on combined with his movements “become” his subject matter.

Paterson Ewen aggressively gouges into the plywood with his router, but there is a loose and playful, almost improvisational, feel to his work.

I am also drawn to other material-based artists such as Alberto Burri, Anselm Kiefer, and Amish Kapoor who use texture as a way of getting to the essence of the work.



Q: When is the ideal time for you to create?

A: This question makes me chuckle, as I feel creativity cannot be predicted. I go to my studio everyday first thing in the morning and begin to hack away at my paintings, whether I feel creative or not. Because I paint in a very reactionary way, it is the pounding, scraping, pouring and brushing that eventually brings me into a playful and courageous state of mind.

Q: Where does your inspiration come from?

A: My inspiration comes from the natural textures of the world. The Canadian Shield, adjoining lakes and northern pines as well as the smaller worlds of lichen, sphagnum, glacial scars, fossils and mosses wedged into rock crevasses.

I retreat to the woods every year for about two weeks. Thanks to my husband who looks after our three kids, I have been able to keep this tradition for 15 years now.

This solitary time has become a very important and necessary component to my practice-to be able to paint and sit for lengths of time, unplug, be present, observe and feel.

Q: Why do you feel compelled to create?

A: I think we all feel compelled to create, whether it is composing a symphony, designing a building, or making a peach pie. I am compelled to dig, scrape and gouge layers with my hands.

Before I became a full-time artist in 2001, I had a career in massage therapy for 20 years. This may seem like an unlikely connection, but perhaps palpating soft tissue and manipulating joints can be thought of as somewhat the same as sculpting beeswax or excavating down into layers?

I once heard someone say, "Artists who like to dig are trying to get at the truth." This idea appeals to me because I do feel compelled to reveal, strip down or get to the bottom, so to speak. It seems to be in my nature.



Q: What's up next for you as an artist and as a person? Do you have any personal aspirations, artwork challenges, exhibitions or projects?

A: I will continue to toil away in my studio. Beeswax is such a gorgeous and multifaceted medium that, no doubt, it will continue to fascinate me.

Muse Gallery in Toronto sells my work and I have just recently joined Gallery 3 in Ottawa. They have offered me a solo exhibition this fall, so I plan to work towards that.

Outside my painting practice, I am curating a photography exhibit at Kingston's Pump House Steam Museum this April/May called Shoreline Shuffle Revisited. The exhibit will showcase all the photos and videos that were taken during a public protest in Kingston last June 2013.

I will also be hosting a forum that will discuss Kingston's newly projected Public Arts Master Plan and another forum to discuss Kingston's Long Term Integrated Waterfront Plan.

As well, I will be travelling to Turkey to an artists' retreat for three weeks. The location sounds fabulous and steeped in history. Our accommodations are an ancient stone house overlooking the Aegean Sea. We plan to explore Istanbul and nearby islands as well. I am very excited about all the new experiences I will be exposed to and I'm sure this will influence my practice in some way.

Q: And, finally, to borrow from James Lipton's Inside the Actor's Studio television program: If heaven exists, what would you like God to say when you arrive at the pearly gates?

A: I think I would ask the first question, which would be, "Hello God, why are you wearing horns and a spike-tipped tail? Is there a masquerade party going on?" And to this s/he may reply, "Come on in, the party carries on!"