

A Local Artist Revives a Century's-Old Painting Technique in Modern Paintings

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Mary Farmer 415.302.4348

mary411@maryfarmer.com

<http://www.maryfarmer.com>

San Francisco, CA – Look at artist Mary Farmer's (www.maryfarmer.com) work a few times, you'll also be surprised by what you see. Her bright, bold abstract paintings, which are created by a very old-school layering technique, seem to change with every viewing.

Farmer creates the illusion of a shifting canvas by using a painting technique called encaustic, which originated in the 4th century. The ancient Greeks used the multi-layering technique of painting with beeswax and resin for murals and to color statues. Out of favor since the Middle Ages, the difficult-to-use method is now slowly gaining a following – and has been brought to light by the likes of American artist Jasper Johns.

Farmer keeps paints fluid with heat, in order to apply the layers upon layers (how many she doesn't even know), and then she applies them to the canvas. When she withdraws the heat, they become sharp and crisp. And, with Farmer's nuanced skill, the effect is mesmerizing – creating a sense of sparkling, shifting light, and a feeling of movement.

Farmer took to the medium after over a decade of working with – and being frustrated by – oils. Attempting to create a feeling of depth in her abstracts, she layered the oil paints and other materials, such as twigs and fabrics. But it looked flat, rather than rich and alive.

While in art school at Georgia State University, about eight years ago, one of her professors recognized Farmer's dissatisfaction and recommended she try encaustic. After a period of initial resistance and many failed attempts of creating art while heating and cooling beeswax, Farmer finally hit her stride. She had found a way to get luminosity and depth in her paintings.

Now, when people approach her illusory paintings, their first reaction is to touch it, to find out how all those layers feel to the fingertips. Then, on second viewing, people start to notice that the colors look like they are moving and gesturing. A third viewing really makes the observant see how the layers interact. And, finally, once people want to touch it, see the movement, and observe the layers all at once – the paintings feel alive, like they are changing right before your eyes.

But, Farmer, an abstract painter who uses an ancient-art technique, identifies herself not a modern artist, nor as an encaustic painter. Instead, she says she is a Californian artist. She embraces the use of lots of colors, interactions, and grand gestures – a distinctly West Coast way.

Mary Farmer has had gallery showings and juried shows across the country, including in Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco, Indianapolis, Athens, GA, Mill Valley, CA, and Laredo, TX. She has received awards and accolades for her work, including at the following arenas: The Postcard Show, Lincoln Center, NYC, NY; Atlanta College of Art's Presidential Scholarship; 10th International Juried Exhibition, The Laredo Center for the Arts.

Note to Editor: High Resolution images are available by request.