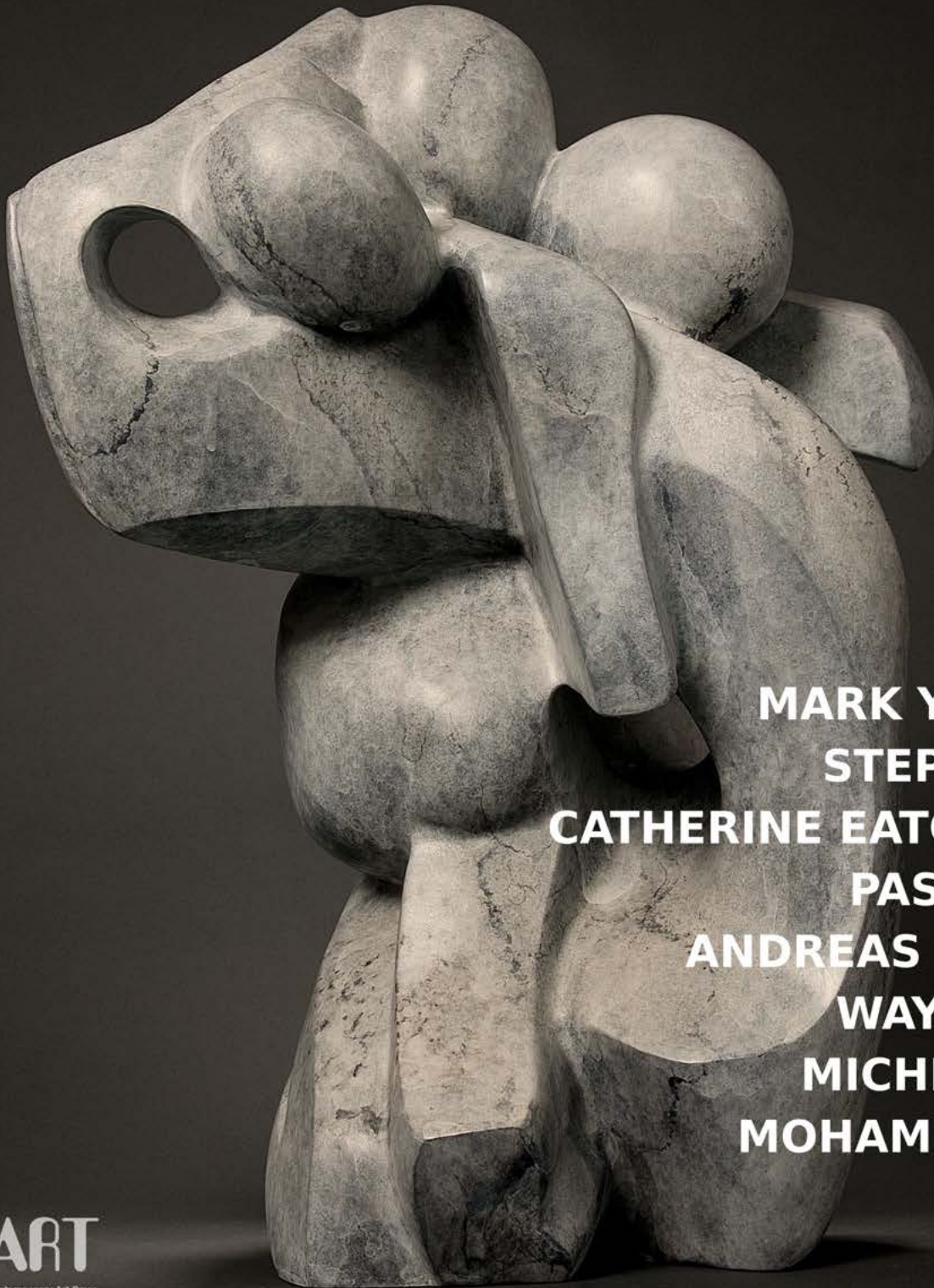


LandEscape

CONTEMPORARY ART REVIEW

Anniversary Edition



**MARK YALE HARRIS
STEPHEN COHEN
CATHERINE EATON SKINNER
PASCAL PIERME
ANDREAS MONOPOLIS
WAYNE MADSEN
MICHIEL ALBERTS
MOHAMED BENHADJ
ESS BECK**

ART
Contemporary Art Press

Chaos by Mark Yale Harris

Catherine Eaton Skinner

An artist's statement

The power of the natural world, its intrinsic energy and fundamental properties, is dependent upon a fine balance. The balance of positive and negative forces resides from the smallest particles that make up our universe to concepts we live with every day: night/day and dark/light; finite/infinite and one/zero; quiet/loud and soft/hard; organic/manmade and the natural environment as opposed to the constructed cities.

My work has been centered on concepts of this balance of opposites, as well as methods of numerical systems and patterning we use to construct an order to our world. Counting and measuring have been our way to bring order to the disorder around us. I have been pursuing a deep investigation of the symbolic number, 108, a number with powerful meanings, especially in Eastern religions and traditions. The repetition of 108 occurs in many of my paintings as background, a regular pattern or a block of forms, usually related to the circle or spiral. I often use a vertical red line or bar symbolizing the energy of life between heaven to earth, as it weaves through our lives, past, present and future.

Repetition used as a practice allows for focus. The completion of this work over time takes determination and concentration, which leads to an inner center of quiet, the dissolution of the self into the whole. Purity and simplicity come with the commitment in this ritual of patterns and their echo. Energy and a sense of order are concentrated in the work by the continuous reiteration of the same path, the same pattern, the same practice.

Numerous methods have been used to go through the number of cycles in ritual repetition, thus eliminating the distraction of keeping count. The earliest method was stones counted out and then dropped into a bowl of water, as prayers were recited. Knots or beads on a thread are called a rosary or mala, and have been used for centuries to count prayers. The word "bead" traces to the Saxon word, *bidden*, meaning "to pray", and the Sanskrit word *buddh*, meaning self-realization or enlightenment, from which comes the word, *Buddha*. The Buddhist mala has 108 beads, often bodhi tree seeds, an encasement of life. The Sikh tradition has a mala of 108 knots tied in wool twine.

Gya-gye (Tibetan for 108 and one of my series) has powerful meanings, the numbers themselves adding up to nine, but also divisible by 9, one of the sacred numbers in Buddhism and Hinduism. According to their beliefs, humans tell 108 lies, have 108 earthly desires and 108 forms of delusion. There are 108 feelings; with 36 related to the past, 36 related to the present, and 36 related to the future. The 1 in 108 stands for God or higher Truth; the 0 for completeness and emptiness achieved with the abrogation of the ego to the universal spirit. The 8 symbolizes infinity and the idea of *samsara*, reincarnation and the repeating cycle of birth, life and death of the soul.

As a mark-maker, I am drawn to marking methods that have been used by peoples and even some animals to indicate presence and construct a deeper relationship to place and nature. Our cultural memory lies within the physicality of place, as well as its historical and metaphysical meanings. We live in a world where it may be difficult to feel a part of the whole, but we continue to find ways to connect to place, striving ultimately to create a connection with each other.

The five Tibetan elements of earth, water, fire, air, and ether or space also inspire my use of artistic materials. These natural materials are often combined or used in juxtaposition to each other: beeswax, damar resin, oil paint and pigments, stones, old cloth, silk and collected threads, wood, lead, steel and copper wire. The papers used are Himalayan handmade papers made from *Edgeworthia* bark, 100% Rag photo papers and antique papers from Japan, India and Myanmar. The challenge is to balance and oppose the elements simultaneously. Beeswax mixed with damar resin is applied molten to a prepared wood panel. Colored wax and oil stick are built up, erased, scraped and layered, and fused multiple times with a hot air gun. Different colors melt at different rates because of the varying chemical composition and value of the pigments. Layers can be transparent or opaque and the colors gently moved when the wax is in liquid form. The durability of encaustic is due to its imperviousness to moisture, an archival protection for the papers. The final paintings incorporate the fragility of their components within a durable, lasting presence.

Catherine Eaton Skinner



LandEscape meets

Catherine Eaton Skinner

An interview by **Katherine Williams**, curator
and **Josh Ryders**, curator

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Hello Catherine and welcome to LandEscape: before starting to elaborate about your artistic production we would like to invite our readers to visit

<http://www.ceskiner.com>

Let us start this interview with a couple of questions regarding your background. Years after having graduated with a Bachelor of Arts & Sciences from Stanford University, you nurtured your education in the field of art with multiple experiences, including your recent participation to the group workshop *East/West Calligraphy in Venice, Italy*: how did these experiences influence your evolution as an artist? Moreover, how does your previous studies in Biology direct your interest into the exploration of the *balance of opposites* that marks out your artistic research?

As a young child, I picked up my first crayon and continually drew. I grew up in the Pacific Northwest of the United States with fresh water lakes and the Puget Sound between multiple mountain ranges. Our parents surrounded us with Northwest Art

and encouraged our creativity. My sister and I were close in age and we both became artists. My career as a professional artist began at Stanford University, illustrating for the Biology Department, while getting my bachelor's degree. The San Francisco Bay Area Figurative Movement was in full force at that time; this was influential when I took art classes in-between my pre-med schedule. Drawing class with Frank Lobdell was sumi-ink, bamboo pen and brush. I still use this medium, investigating calligraphy and loving large, loose brushes, plus mark-making with graphite on Mylar. Painting class was oil on canvas with Nathan Oliveira. Acrylic paints were newly available on the market, but not allowed in class.

After graduation, marriage, and a year as a VISTA volunteer in Atlanta, Georgia, I moved to San Juan Island, Washington. We built our home, grew our own food for three children and tended to our farm animals. I learned to spin my sheep's wool, weave and use natural dyes. My illustration concentrated on marine invertebrates and algae for field guides, books, graphics and research papers. My illustration was ecology driven - based on the interactions of the different species and



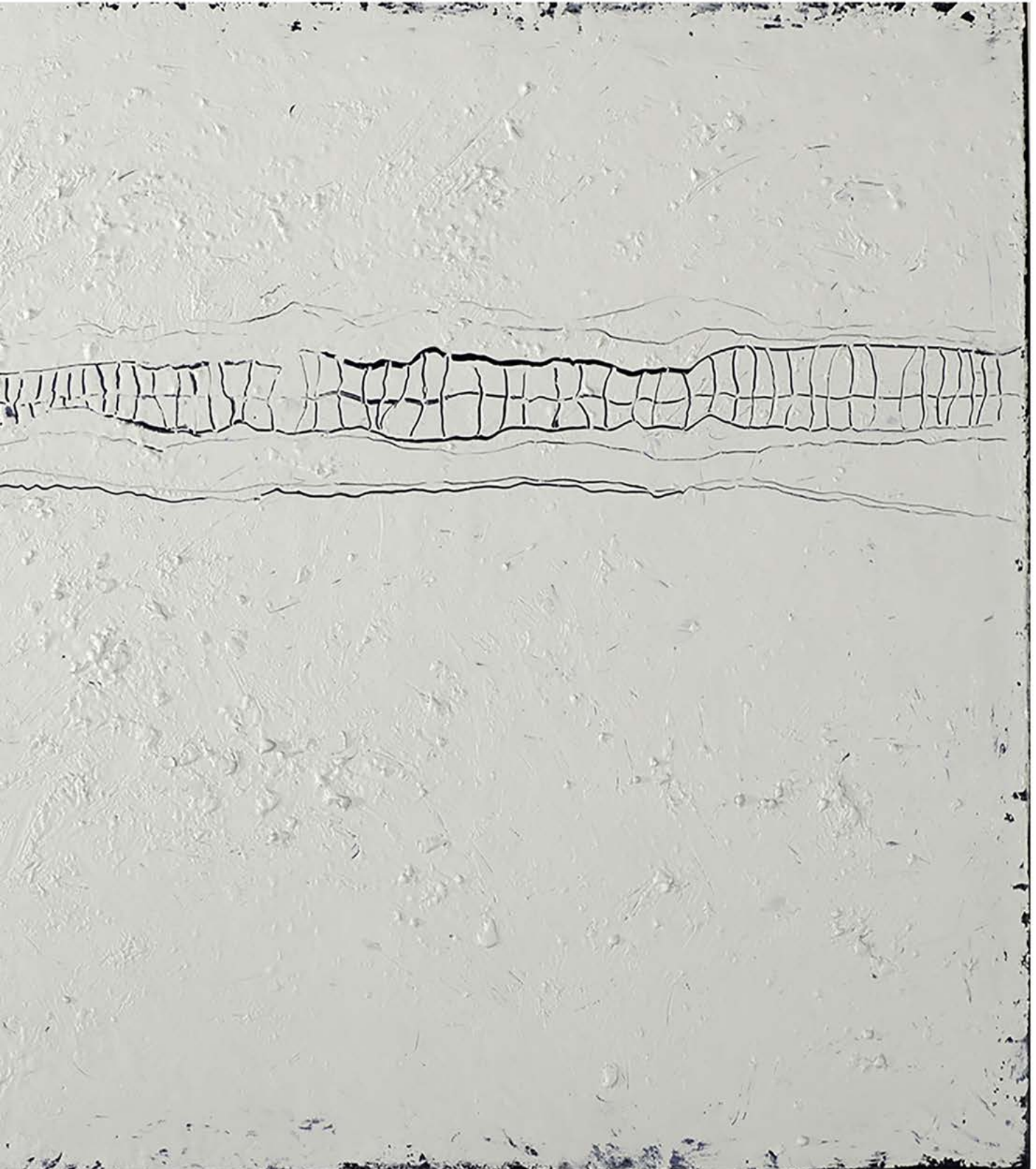
plant life. The ink and watercolor nature drawings started to be exhibited regionally.

After an amicable divorce in my mid-thirties, I remarried. We built and operated a farm and garden store called Haymakers Mercantile for five years. When we moved to Seattle in 1990, I returned to oil painting on canvas, exploring color and texture, as well as the simplicity and complications of abstraction, after the years of precise ink drawing.

The balance of opposites refers to much in my work: between fine lines and large gestural strokes; from dark to light within the piece; and panels of opposing values. I explore the balance of energies in many cultures; the intrinsic energy and fundamental properties of the delicate natural world depend on this. The equilibrium of positive and negative forces extends throughout universal concepts: dark/light, finite/infinite, soft/hard, and organic/inorganic. The five elements - earth, fire, water, air and space - are the foundation of this universe, our bodies, and our mental and spiritual selves. Maintaining the balance among and within the elements and understanding their energies is paramount to our survival, as well as to my spirit.

You are a versatile artist and the body of works that we have selected for this special edition of *LandEscape* reveal your ability to cross from painting, encaustic and photography to printmaking and sculpture. What addresses you to such stimulating multidisciplinary approach? In particular,





Reiteration Install view Abmeyer+Wood, Seattle



Reiteration VI, 30x40, 2017

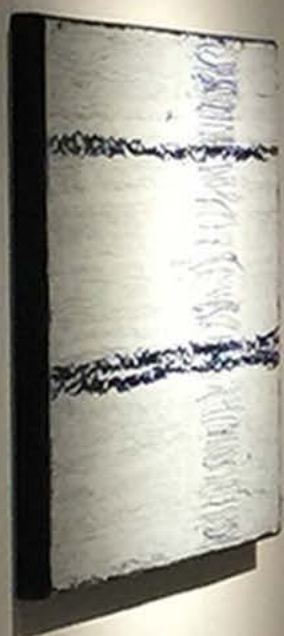


what are the expressive qualities that you are searching for in the techniques that you use in your artistic research?

For many years, I have been a full time, multidisciplinary artist, usually working conceptually in series. My different media cross-pollinate with beeswax, resin and oil, binding the work together. I have always collected stones, as used in **Kamidana**, (god's shelf in Japanese) - 108 wrapped on 9 red waxed bars. For **Gather**, 108 juniper sticks collected while on walks were bundled, wrapped with hand natural dyed textiles and wire, then fastened to a waxed Bhutanese paper mounted on a wood panel. Wire strung across a work is hung with found objects, feathers and old textiles, and another painting with bundles of purifying salt. Precious metals of gold, silver and palladium reflect off soft, wax backgrounds. Book pages, collected papers and multiple photographs form the basis of the 108 grid patterns. Cast glass and bronze sculptures stand with the painting series of ravens. Lead sheeting, crumpled and wrapped around a wood panel, represents earth, opposing the subtlety of pale blue wax symbolizing water or ether. The work defines the material it needs, and the opposition of these media expresses the integration or conflict of the elemental concepts I am trying to express.

Fortunately, I have been able to travel extensively: Bhutan, India, Japan, Myanmar, Indonesia, the Southern Hemisphere, Africa and many European countries. My travel,

Catherine Eaton Skinner
REITERATION





Reiteration Install view Abmeyer+Wood, Seattle



Passages VII, 24x24, 2015

photography skills, book-making and journaling all contribute to my portfolio of images and connections to various cultures and times. The thread in my work is the

elemental archetypes of the physical and cosmic world: water, ether, earth, fire, wind and woods. The animal world as expressed in the book **Unleashed** is paintings of animal



Passages VI, 24x24, 2015

eyes; the Woodland Park Zoo and University of Washington Press published this. The corvid family of birds has sought me out around the world to draw, paint and sculpt,

using techniques that express their voices in their fascinating mythology.

I am attracted to places of worship and natural sites where people have gathered in



Passages VIII, 24x24, 2015

pilgrimage or simply to seek a deeper relationship to locations of metaphysical power. What offerings do they bring and leave behind to indicate their presence?

Our cultural memory lies within the physicality of place and its historical meanings. We live in a world where it may be difficult to feel a part of the whole. Investigating these patterns and



Reiteration XV, Rivulets, 36x36, 2018

sacred spaces has become my connection with different cultures.

In the deep woods of Bhutan, burgundy threads are placed upon a branch at the

confluence of pathways. Torn from the hem of a monk's robe on a pilgrimage to the mountain temple, these threads have been tied as an offering to guardians of

the earth. Prayer flags are wrapped in the trees and up wooden poles, twisted and tattered from the fierce winds on a Himalayan pass, sending prayers continually into the sky. In Japan, a stone, paper fortune, or beautifully prepared bundle of rice is left as an offering. An ancient Jewish synagogue in Tunisia has thousands of prayers written on paper and placed in metal grills high on the inner sanctuary wall. As witnessed on the chain link fences surrounding the World Trade Center in New York City, the heartbreak of notes, ribbons and photos are placed to mark the loss and horrors of our current American culture.

We have really appreciated the way your *Stacks series* suspends the viewers in the interstitial area where reminders to reality and pure imagination blend together in a coherent combination. How would you define the relationship between abstraction and representation in your practice? In particular, how does reality and a tendency towards abstraction find their balance in your work?

With the eyes of a biologist I peer deep into the microscopic lens and outward to the vastness of the universe. We each see differently in photography, the focus and crop of an image. I often shoot with a 100 to 300 lens, using it as a macro lens, allowing me to stand back. Reality becomes abstract instantly and the image reflects the essence of the nature-based subjects.

The paintings in the **Stacks series** began with my photographs of printed signatures in the press runs at EBS Press in Verona, Italy. We were printing my newest book **108**, published by Radius Books of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Continuous horizontal marks shift with the addition of the new pages and imperfect stacking. Colors and shades between black and white flow downward on the edges. Printed on a 100% rag paper and mounted on wood panels, the piece is then layered and textured with encaustic wax, the color intensified with oil stick.

Stacks dwells in the realm of the horizontal line: the boundary between sky and ocean; distant horizons of desert and open land; layers of water frozen into ice; seeps of mineral laden water in earthen walls; ombre textiles of Navaho rugs; seismic wavelengths; and the tracking of heart rhythms.

You often allow an open reading, a great multiplicity of meanings: associative possibilities play a crucial role in your pieces. How important is this degree of openness in order to involve the viewers in their visual experience?

Nathan Oliveira was my painting professor at Stanford University and in 1999 I worked with him for a two-week residency at the Santa Fe Art Institute, New Mexico. He spoke to the mission





of showing up and doing the work. Staying focused requires being present in the studio. Memories are important to incubate as your own, holding on deeply to ideas until they are resolved before being brought forth into physical form. I also spent a month-long residency with Anne Truitt at the Institute. She talked of feedback as necessary, but sometimes distracting, describing vulnerability as the guardian of integrity.

Each piece then represents a private pilgrimage, a personal truth. When the dialog between myself and the work is complete, it must be released as the power within the work becomes the magnet for others.

My series often have multiple meanings that increase as they build in numbers. Both of the newest series, **Between the Gates** and **Remnants**, have multiple meanings. The work must always stand on its own and make the viewer want to live with it, discovering nuances that relate to their daily experiences and lives.

How would you define the relationship between environment and your work in the Passages series?

Passages and **Vestiges** were developed after traveling on the Eurostar Paris to London on a perfect fall afternoon. I began taking over 300 photos with my iPhone: farmland, forests and industrial structures. The rush of the foreground with the distant

sky was indicative of the landscapes disappearing from our fast-moving world.

During that time, I had been studying in the studio and painting tantric symbols. The red, upright triangle captures the power of the elements of air, wind, water and earth. The triangle above the square forms a house, an image that was repeatedly showing up in my dreams. The simple outline of the house encapsulates the memories that are embedded within us as described in the book I was reading, **The Poetics of Space**, by Gaston Bachelard. These forms inscribed into the moving landscapes enfold the still memory of what is lost.

Your approach has a depth of layers that matches your need to allow a work to be beautiful, as well as spiritual: how do you consider the relationship between spirituality and your artistic practice?

The religion I grew up in celebrated family and ancestors, honoring each day in the Northwest environment. When spending time in churches, I found I would rather be quietly in the woods. When I began traveling to the Far East, I became interested in Buddhism. That is what is in my heart and practice in my work. I have also studied shamanism and am fascinated by the simplicity, as well as complexity, of native cultures. I think all of these come to fruition in my work without specifically speaking to





Toya Lon II, 10x7x3, 2008

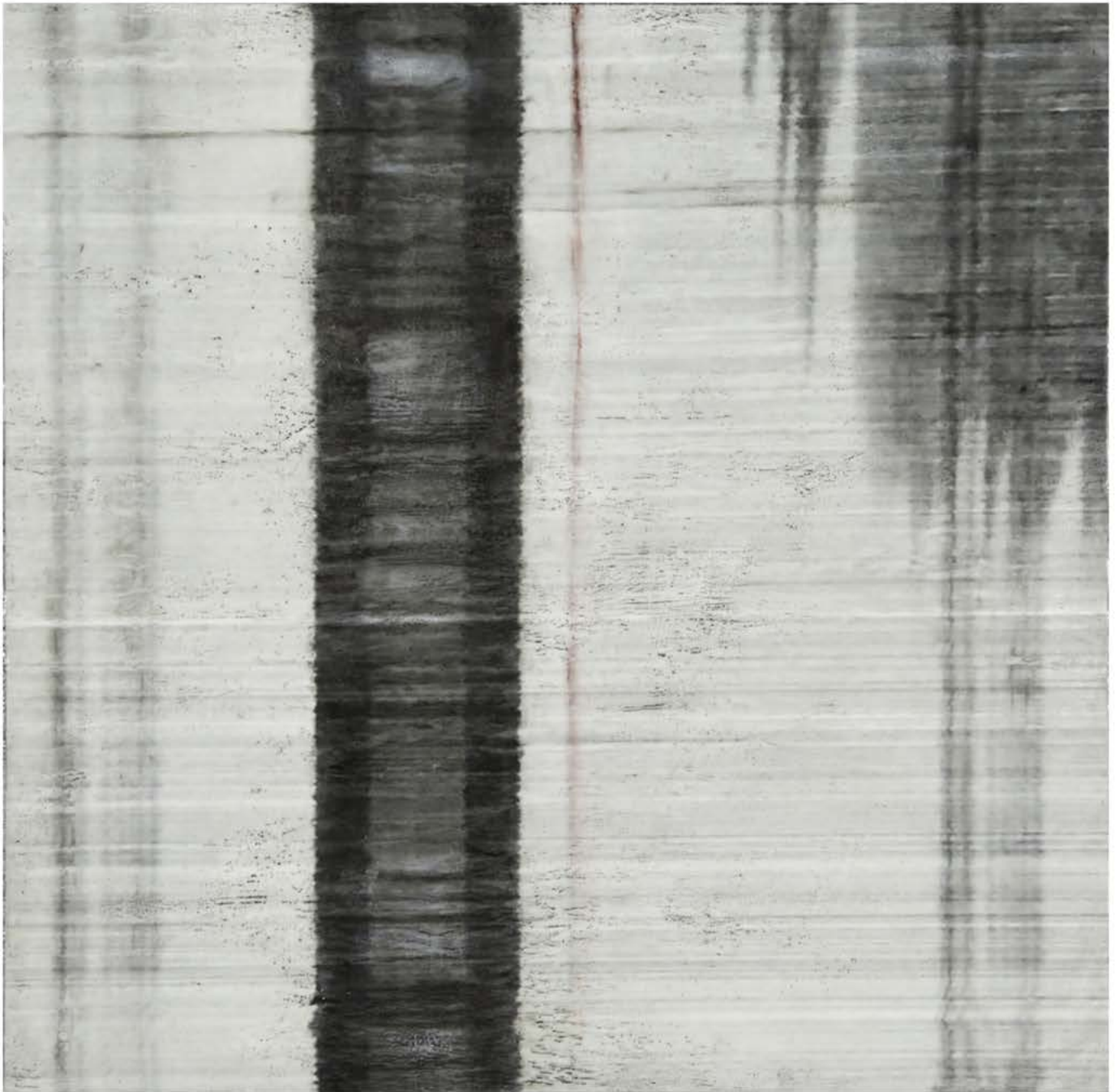


Stack

one religion, but to the spiritual thread that ties humanity together.

The number 108 and its conceptual range have deeply influenced my artwork over

the past twelve years. This didn't grow out of a personal crisis, but more from a deep sense of sadness. My mother had developed Alzheimer's and my father, after years of caring for her by himself, had



Stacks II, 24x24, 2017

finally made the decision to move her to an assisted-care facility. The following year, I traveled to Bhutan with Julie Speidel, a close friend and artist. I found myself immersed in a country where the daily lives

of the Bhutanese people are fully integrated with their Buddhist faith. Their respect for the environment and blessings for all living beings are continually part of their existence. It was this journey that set



Stacks V, 24x24, 2017

me on this path and it continues to have a profound effect on my art and my life.

The ritual using the count of 108 for prayers and offerings is cloaked in mystery, but most often in reference to the early Vedic sages of

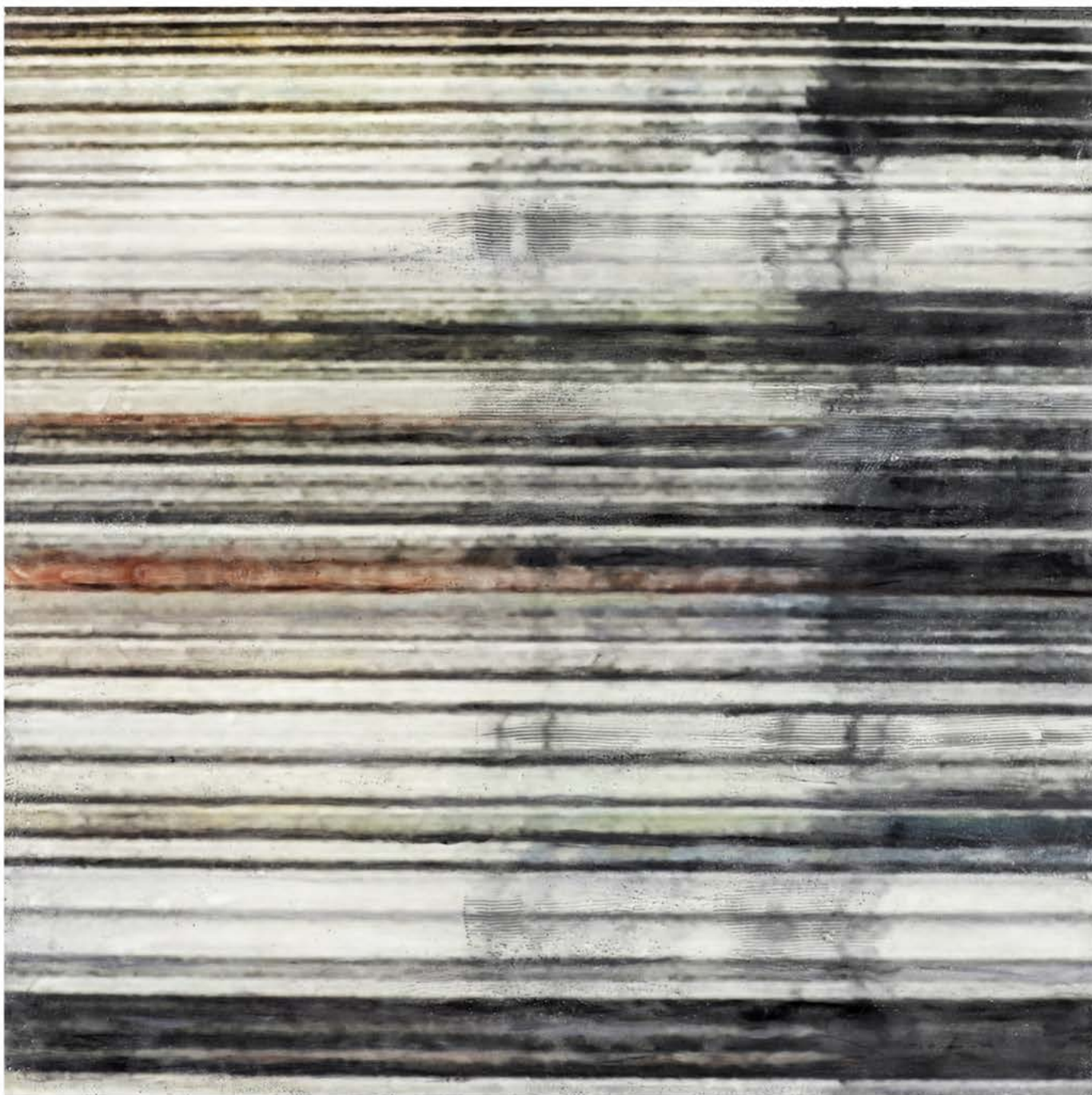
India. Early connections in the sphere of Hindu-Buddhist thought are made to cosmology, astrology and astronomy. This exploration is fascinating to read, but what became part of my work was the use of that



Stacks VI, 24x24, 2017

number to create patterns and repetition of forms. As Mahatma Gandhi so aptly stated, “The mantra becomes one’s staff of life and carries one through every ordeal. Each repetition has a new meaning.”

108 represents the whole of our universe and our existence within it. Each number has its own sacred significance. One represents the supreme truth or god consciousness; zero for the void and the



Stacks VIII, 24x24, 2017

potential for all, the bindu; eight for infinity and eternity, the reincarnation of our souls or samsara.

When I returned to my Santa Fe studio, I reflected on my journey. I began the

creative process by tearing a sheet of Himalayan paper into 108 pieces and then subconsciously drew a form often used in the Bhutanese temples. I discovered later that this image was the classic maniratna,



Stacks XI, 24x24, 2017

the precious jewel, placed before the Buddha as an offering.

Each of us follows our own pathways, hopefully continuing to explore, learn and

open ourselves to new thoughts and experiences. I am ever thankful to show my work as an expression of my pilgrimage. Across a world of differences, hopefully all

of us are seeking some joy, solace, and a bond with each other.

We would like to pose some questions about the balance established by colors and texture: we have really appreciated the vibrancy of thoughtful nuances that saturate your canvas and especially the way they suggest the idea of plasticity. How did you come about settling on your color palette? And how much does your own psychological make-up determine the nuances of tones you decide to use in a piece, in particular, how do you develop a painting's texture?

My color palette varies with series and subject matter. I cut color swatches and collage them together in my studio journals. This works especially well for putting colors together quickly within their values, hues and oppositions. My colors also react to what is happening in the world because I do not work in a vacuum, and this may lead to a painting out of series.

Blacks and whites with a touch of red that represent life's energy are also my signature. I am fond of indigo and sienna, and when finishing a piece, will sometimes touch edges with a light turquoise. The **Reiteration series** flows between Ultramarine blues and pale greys, whites and blacks. These paintings have a wax layer countered on top with the opposite color in oil stick. Markings through the oil stick must be worked at once, as it will skim up differently with each passing day and I

have to plan ahead. After the work has dried, I will go back in with more color on top, fusing this in lightly.

If I begin with one of my photographs beneath the clear wax, the layering of colored wax and oil stick gives it depth. I always brush on the hot wax and in the melting have learned where to leave textural areas in opposition to the calmness of fully melted smoothness. Textural areas may have filled or wiped color on the surface. The woven linen substrate also adds texture if a heavy layer of wax is not applied. Encaustic has the ability to build texture quickly and an area may be tinted a different hue with oil stick and wiped down. The fluidity of the wax with layered colors is manipulated by the heat.

It's important to remark that you have been working with encaustic media and oil on panel for over 20 years: how do you consider the physicality of this medium and why does it fascinate you?

I was self-taught in the encaustic process before these techniques became readily available for artists. In my thirties I developed a batik process on cotton with India ink pen drawings using my illustration skills. The return to using hot wax was very comfortable when I began the encaustic paintings. I switched to linen on panel, sometimes adding papers with free drawing beneath the wax. Many years in illustration allows me to use any method that works. Working



Birdman, 11x3x5, 2018



Falcon Horus 11x3x5, 2018

with wax one can build up, erase, scrape and fuse, balancing the elements of the work “under fire.” Use of the oil sticks gives me the satisfaction of straight tactile painting and the waxes flexibility gives me opportunity. There becomes a seeming fragility and presence of the components originating from the bees and trees.

In your art career you have had 37 solo exhibitions in 38 years, with participation in multiple invitational group exhibitions. How important is it for you to establish a direct relationship with your audience and how does the feedback you receive fuel your artistic research? In particular, do you see yourself creating a particular kind of audience other than that of the art world?

The “art world audience” is vast with multiple facets. As an artist I am vulnerable to criticism. Doing the work brings me joy and satisfaction, being in that moment with each piece as it develops and changes beyond my original idea. My book, **108**, gave me a sense of completion of those 14 years of work. The book became an explanation of why, as well as how I live and work. I am fortunate to be able to do what I do, change to another series when life changes around me, and not be held to a certain concept or repetition of what has already left my studio. I may circle back to older pieces and work journals, rework my thoughts and go forward. Each time I travel

it opens new visual avenues. Each exhibition leads to new work. When I am in the studio, new ideas flourish, feeding and leading me.

Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Catherine. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving?

Some artists fall easily into writing and talking of their work. I am learning, but do not really enjoy art speak. I would rather write a poem for a statement. Thank you for giving me this opportunity and including me in this fine magazine.

I would love to work on a museum exhibition that curates my published book **108**. Conceptually, there is much material to expand into a space. I hope to collaborate again with David Chickey at Radius Books on another book including a mixture of my poetry, new work and photography. More writing seems to be in the plan.

I have family and six growing grandchildren that come into the equation, time that moves faster and slips by with each day. Maintaining balance is required as I aspire to be the Jungian archetype of a wise, old woman.

*An interview by **Katherine Williams**, curator and **Josh Ryders**, curator*

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