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Suzanne Bell



PHOTO BY DANTE FONTANA

There is more involved than just paint and a brush for this Sierra Springs artist.

Suzanne Bell practices an ancient form of art called “encaustic.” This art medium meaning “to burn in,” involves beeswax, dammar resin and powdered pigments. The wax is first put into tins, then onto a hot plate, and from there it is painted onto a wood surface where it is manipulated with a blowtorch. “It’s not an easy process and it’s very messy,” Bell says. “One of my favorite things about painting with encaustics is I get to use a blowtorch, which is so much fun!”

It was about five years ago when Bell discovered her calling. She attended a class in encaustic painting and instantly knew that she had found her medium. Since then, she has taken a few more classes, but has mostly learned by experimentation.

Bell was born in Placerville and raised in Pollock Pines. She earned her bachelor’s degree from Sacramento State in psychology with an emphasis in fine arts and education. After college she started teaching art, and throughout the years she has taken several art classes in Oregon, Washington and California.

She has painted with watercolors, acrylics and mosaics, but mainly creates encaustic paintings. Bell enjoys painting this style of art the most because of its endless possibilities, and the way the molten wax moves so free flowing. “It lends

itself to a playful sense of freedom,” she says. “The result is a painting uniquely transparent, with a lush surface that is simultaneously sensual and contemplative.”

Bell has been painting since the time she could hold a paintbrush. Her mother recalls when she was two years old, she was at her easel and when asked what she was doing, the young artist replied, “I’m painting, I’m being Picasso.” Picasso is still one of her favorite artists today because Bell says he is “out of the box.” She is also fond of Van Gogh for his rhythm and movement, and Georgia O’Keeffe for her boldness.

Bell is constantly inspired by her surroundings, but most of her inspiration comes stems from her imagination...including random ideas, a mood, nature, rhythm, movement, music and color. Because her work lends itself to surrealism, her commissions are created from a client’s desire for a particular color or movement.

She has been showing and selling her art for the past five years, and according to Bell, this magical medium and its process fascinate people. In addition to creating full time, she teaches encaustic workshops and a youth art program, Advanced Art Academy, in Placerville.

“Painting is my passion; it’s in my soul,” Bell says. “There’s a spiritual introspective connection when I create; it’s exhilarating and peaceful at the same time.”

Bell is also in the process of writing a couple books – one on encaustic techniques and the other focusing on how to teach art to children. She has a gallery at 429 Main Street, Suite 7, in Placerville. People can view her work at the Fusion Gallery in Placerville and at the 20th Street Art Gallery in Sacramento.

For more information on Suzanne Bell’s work, visit suzannebellsart.com.