



Invisibly Present / Visibly Absent

Sam Hussein

Here and Now

On the night of March 11, I loaded up the car with my art for the show "[Invisibly Present / Visibly Absent](#)". The following day I unloaded it and put the art back into my home. A virus *invisible* to the human eye very much made itself *present* and much human interaction became *visibly absent*.

The themes touched upon here are clearly related to environmental concerns, but don't depend on a certain carbon level becoming a tipping point in terms of climate disruption. Rather, much of the work is rooted in the wider notion of what our relationship should be with Nature. Our hubris needs to be tempered, our desire to control and conquer Nature needs to be checked. Failing to do so does tremendous damage to the outside world and to our inner lives.

With respect to the current pandemic, these notions are especially relevant if the ultimate causes of the pandemic are human actions like factory farming, deforestation or -- more directly -- the very real threat of dangerous bio-laboratory work. Nature (as in Katrina in New Orleans) or "alien" culture (as in Chinese wet markets) are often blamed for disasters rather than actions of establishment institutions.

It's fitting that this work appear at the Jerusalem Foundation's Al-Quds Gallery since the Israeli assault on Palestinian people and culture is the "tip of the spear" in many respects of a settler colonial / corporate model attack on indigenous populations whose culture tends to work more with Nature.

Absolute Ownership



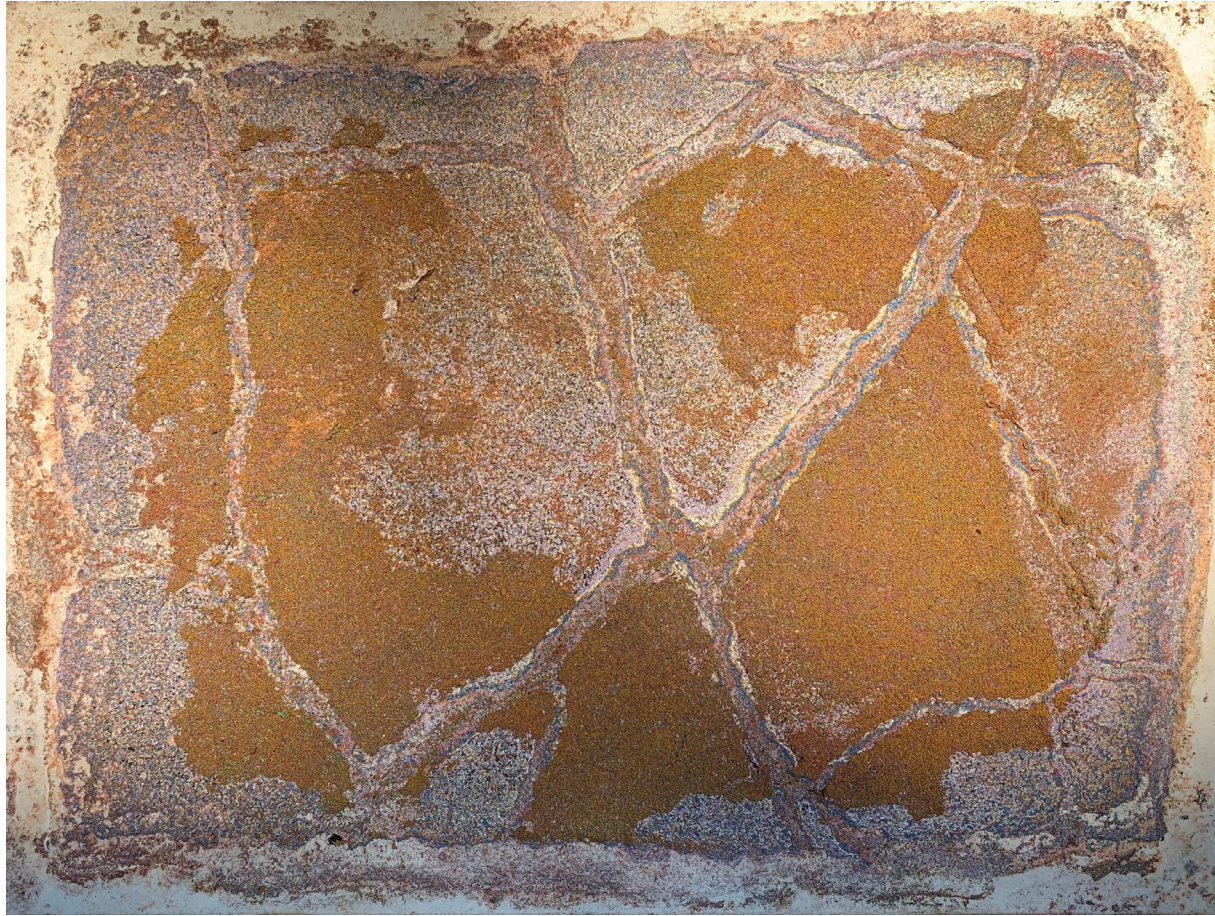
detail

Absolute Ownership 2019

24 x 18 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$1,000

Charles Avila in *Ownership: Early Christian Teaching*, outlines Augustine's beliefs: "The Creator, who alone is Absolute Owner, did not make us human beings so many 'islands,' without any relation to each other, but one human family, 'made from one mud' and sustained 'on one earth.'...We enjoy the same natural conditions: 'born under one law, living by one light, breathing one air and [dying one death.](#)'"

Ago



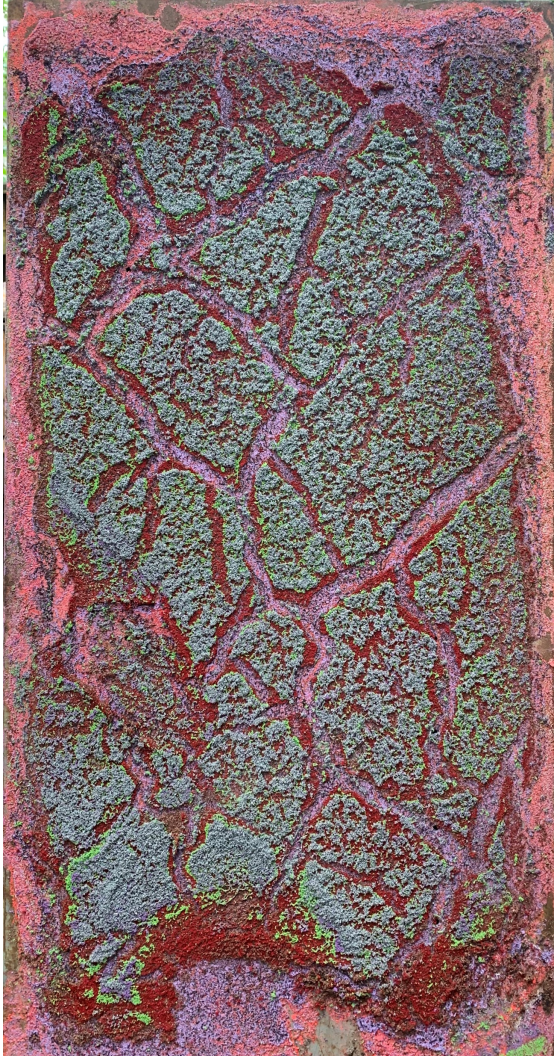
Ago 2017

40 x 30 inches

acrylic on canvas, snow, invisibly present
\$5,000

Ago is one of the first and most successful "snow breakup" pieces. They are created by applying layer after layer of acrylic spray paint on snow as it accumulates on a canvas, often at night. The canvas is then brought inside, "breaks up" in some way, and eventually both melts and dries leaving the paint on the canvas.

From Umm Matthew



From Umm Matthew 2019

18 x 36 inches

acrylic on metal with snow visibly absent and invisibly present

\$5,000

Several years ago, my partner Emily and I visited the parents of a childhood friend of hers, [Matthew](#), who was gay and had committed suicide. As we were in their backyard, I noticed a series of metal panels leaning up against a shack. "Umm Matthew" said that he was an artist and was planning on doing something with them, she didn't know what. Emily mentioned that I was doing art and "Umm Matthew" insisted that I take the panels and do something with them. One of these panels is so far the best example of both the "breakup" pattern of "Ago" and other pieces with actual individual snowflakes preserved.

Ancient Kitchen



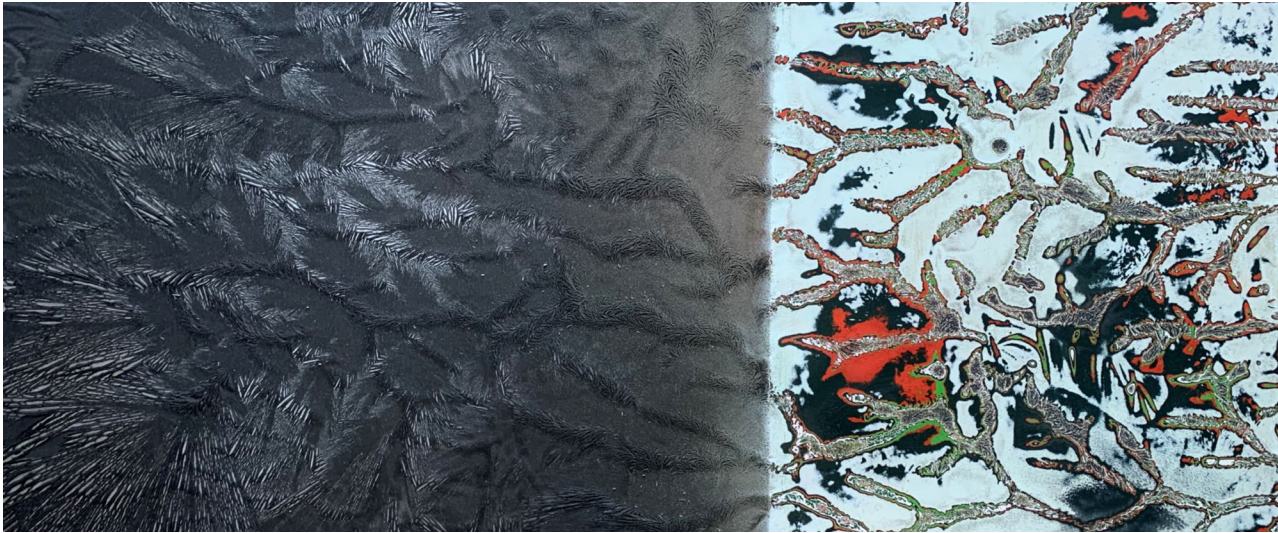
Ancient Kitchen

20 x 16 inches

acrylic on canvas, with flora visibly absent
with flora visibly

\$1,000

Answer Key



Answer Key 2020

24 x 12 inches

frozen latex and acrylic on metal

\$8,000

I've titled a [past temporal piece](#) "Answer Key." This piece similarly reveals to the viewer how something is made. But it also adds a political component: How being Palestinian (or seeing events through the lens of Palestine) can give you a short cut -- an *answer key* -- to the political machinations of various states and institutions. The colors are (slightly off in the case of the red/orange) Palestinian. And a key -- a symbol of Palestinian longing to return to the homes they were driven from by Zionist forces -- is visible absent. It also plays with the notion of simultaneously representing an eternal principle, being seemingly frozen in time while still acting in the now.

The Scorching Sun Which Brings Them Forth



The Scorching Sun Which Brings Them Forth

24 x 36 inches

acrylic on canvas

\$5,000

On Sept. 11, 2001, my then-partner was visiting me in D.C. and was helping out a bit with my media and political work. She was set to leave town that afternoon, but of course stayed after the attacks -- the planes stopped flying and she helped me full time at my job. We worked nonstop, trying to get information out that might avert the coming catastrophes. After about two weeks, I took her to Union Station so she could finally go back to Texas, where she was in grad school. Exhausted, I walked in the area, ending up at the Library of Congress, where they had a remarkable art exhibit about prophetic visions. Finally, I went to the main reading room, sunk in a chair and looked up at the rotunda to see: "[We Taste the Spices of Arabia Yet Never Feel the Scorching Sun Which Brings Them Forth.](#)"

Bessie's Bosom'



details

Bessie's Bosom'

[Pronounced "Bessie's Bosom Prime" -- using the mathematical symbol "prime" meaning a distinct but related or derivative object.]

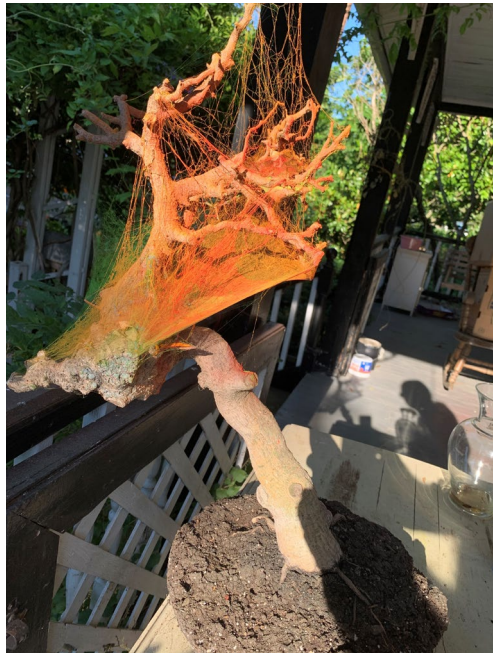
24 x 18 inches

acrylic and excess "dirt" from "Bessie's Bosom"
on paper

NFS

Here, Nature is not only an influence, but is the model in that Nature as a closed system, the excess of one part of the system becomes the input for another part. Thus, "artificial" materials act in a "natural" way.

Both in Tatters Together



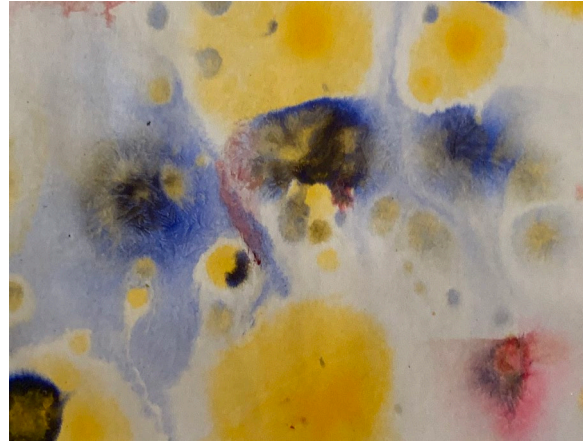
detail

Both in Tatters Together

30 x 14 x 17 inches
acrylic on spider webs on flora
NFS

An experimental composition of
natural form with spider webs that
seem to be modernist.

Celestial Powers in White Space

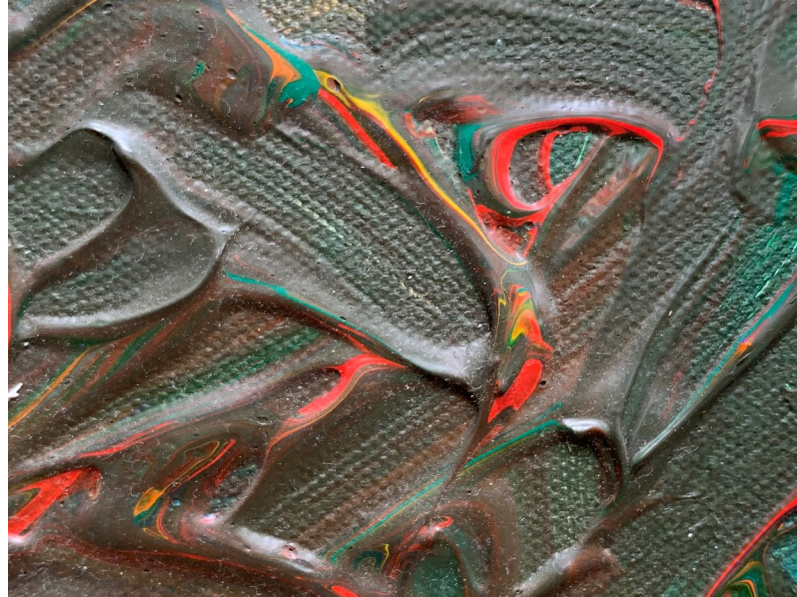


details

Celestial Wonders in White Space

14 x 11 inches
frozen paint on paper
\$1,000

Colorful



detail

Colorful 2008

10 x 7 3/4 inches
acrylic on canvas
NFS

KhaRabia Rayford was an activist in Washington, D.C. and a friend. She wrote a book of poetry titled *We Are Colorful*. It's a cliché that white is the combination of all colors and black is the absence of color. But this is only true for light, not for pigments. As this piece, a sort of natural experiment, shows, the combination of all colors is brown. KhaRabia died on DC's Emancipation Day in 2017. This piece was done on the following Martin Luther King Day in 2008.

Purpose of the Petroleum Age: A Secret Path



Purpose of the Petroleum Age: A Secret Path 2016
2.5 x 2 inches
acrylic, hydrangea invisibly present
NFS

This piece is the inside negative space of a dried hydrangea made visible by layers of acrylic paint sliced open. The title is taken from a Rumi poem with the line:

And if every way i closed before you

The secret one will show a secret path no other eyes have seen

I learned of the poem through a recitation by Duncan Mackintosh on YouTube, but it has been censored by the tech giant because of alleged "community" violations by the interviewer, who is now deceased. Ironically, I can no longer find the full poem on the Internet or elsewhere, nor am I completely certain it exists.

The piece is here mounted on an Arabic mosaic box in the Damascene style. Observing a craftsman working on such tile work in the Syrian capital, a great cultural center of human scale, in 2007 was a major inspiration.

Brain Food



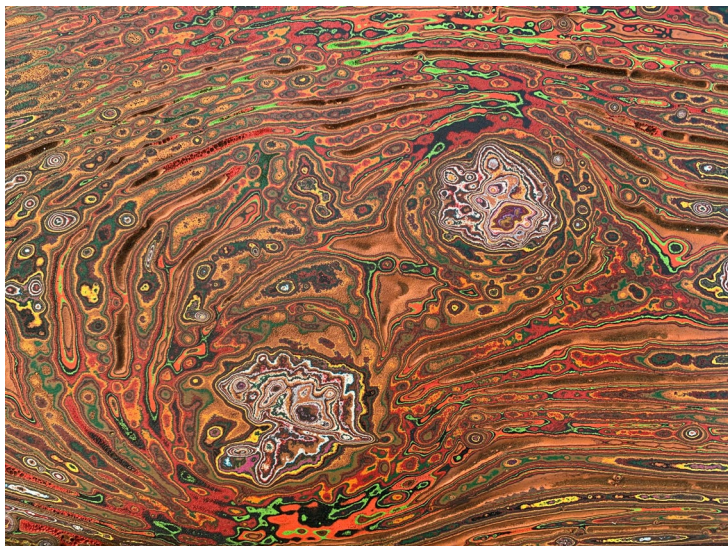
detail

Brain Food 2016

4 x 5 x 6 inches
acrylic and/or enamel paint
on dandelions
NFS

One of my favorite memories as a child is of my mother, recently in the U.S. from Jordan, picking dandelions to make a salad. This piece was to be sliced like "A Secret Path" but it has stayed in this form.

Continuity of Government



Continuity of Government 2020

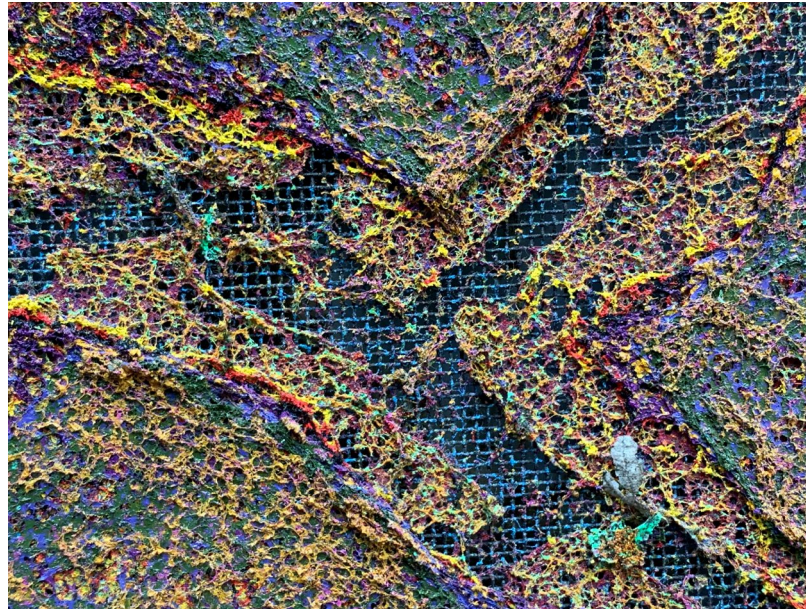
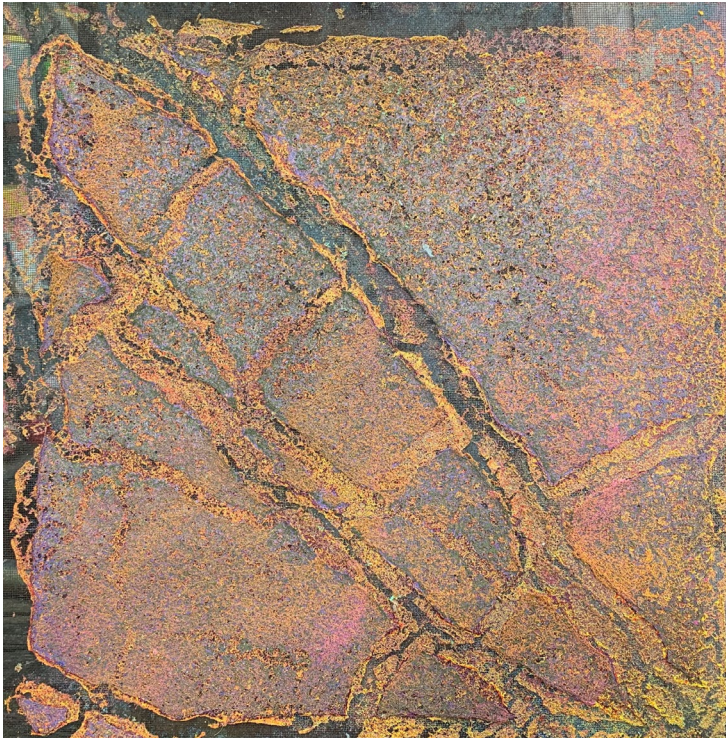
24 x 7 x 1 inches

acrylic on wood and spider webs

NFS

The *Tao Te Ching* speaks of good government being akin to how Nature manifests itself in the world, as if a *continuation* of it. This piece iterates the theme begun with "A Secret Path" -- except now on wood, thus "rings" are added to the wood. So human activity works with Nature to extend and highlight it rather than to constrict or control it. But we can also see the patterns of how government policy manifests on the natural world, with the revealed patterns showing a seemingly threatening climate map, complete with what appear to be horror-stricken faces of Buddhist dragons at the center of the "storms". On July 13, 1987, the Democratic Party Chairman of the Iran Contra Committee, Daniel Inouye, cut off Rep. Jack Brooks when he attempted to question Oliver North about plans for "Continuity of Government" which Brooks described as a "contingency plan in the event of emergency, that would suspend the American constitution." Most major media ignored the issue. This was right around the time of the celebrations around the 200th Anniversary of the U.S. Constitution. The hypocrisy hit me like a wooden two by four. I wrote a piece on some of this much later: "[Killing the Constitution: How I Became a Radical Twenty Years Ago Today.](#)" Inouye and Brooks would die within days of each other in 2012.

Cradle

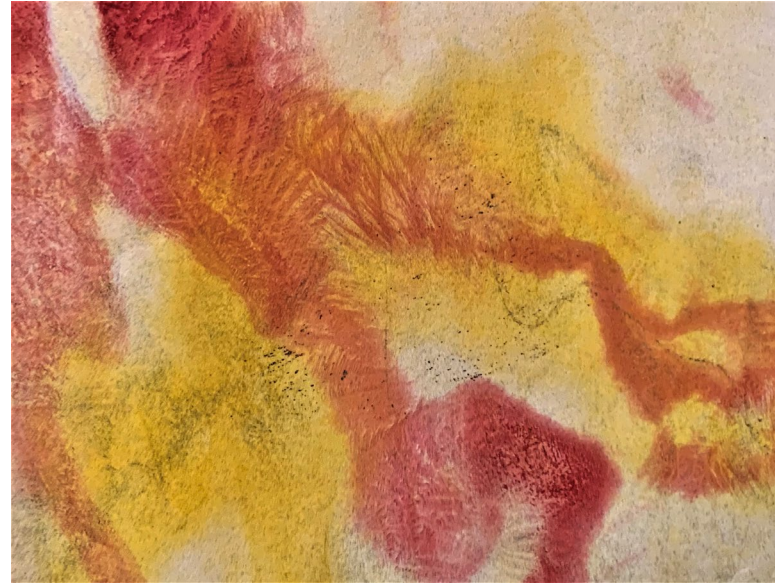


Cradle 2017

40 x 30 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$3,000

This piece bent and almost fell apart as I carried -- cradled -- it in my arms with the snow heavy on it. This led to it "breaking" in such a way as to create two dominant lines which seemed reminiscent of the two rivers that nourish the "Cradle of Civilization".

Crystal Plastic



detail

Crystal Plastic

14 x 11 inches
acrylic on paper
\$300

Dark Room



Dark Room

24 x 18 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$1,000

Don't Just Admire the Vase, Drink the Water



Don't Just Admire the Vase, Drink the Water 2017-2020

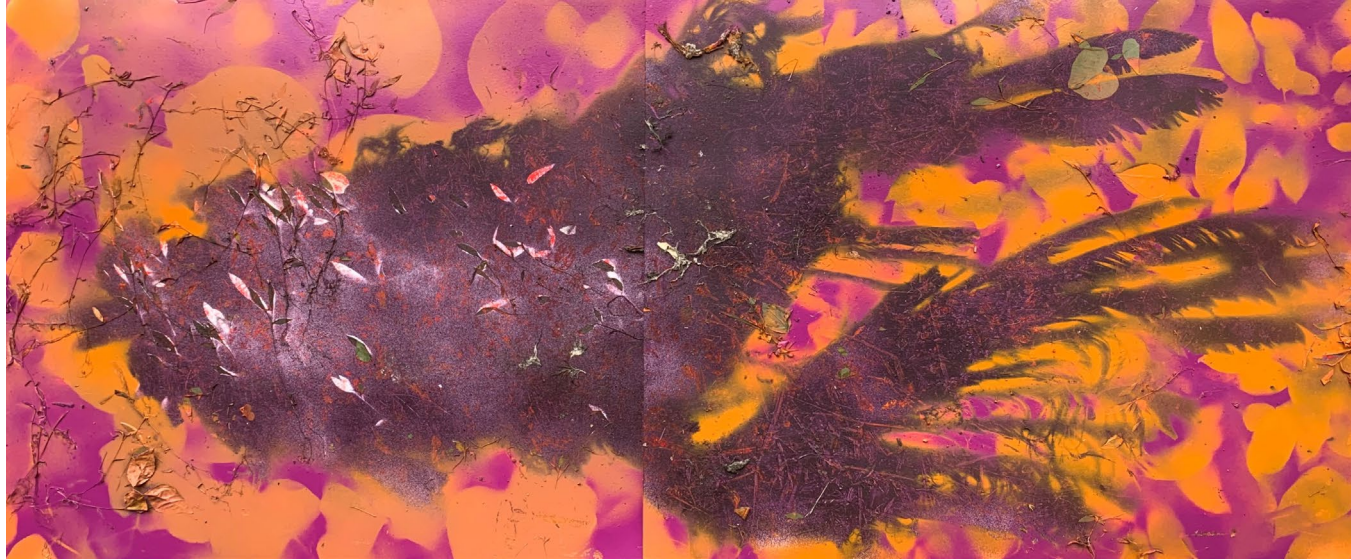
6 x 6 x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches

acrylic and watercolor, flies and spider on glass vase and jars
with water visibly absent

NFS

An ironic use of a Rumi line.

“I am an eagle...”



“I am an Eagle Playing with the Wind”

45 x 19 inches

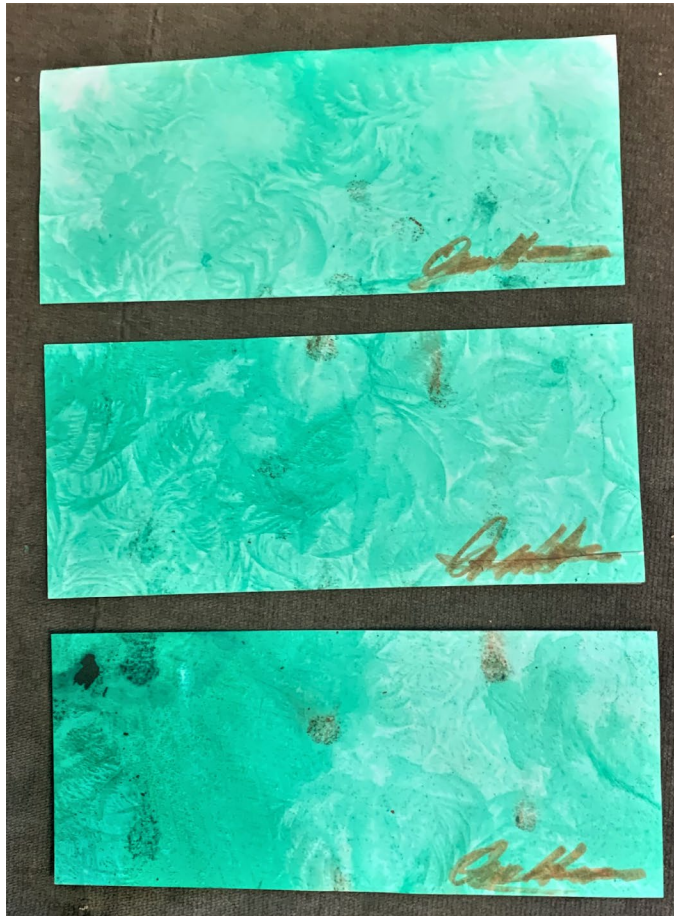
acrylic on paper

flora and fauna visibly absent

\$2,000

This is based on a line from the poem “The Delight Song of Tsoai-talee” N, Scott Momaday, which was put out as an “Art Challenge” by curator Dagmar Painter. Not everyone who proclaims they are something is actually that something. The bird I used was actually found dead on a road. Brave words are sometimes spoken by those who are actually roadkill. Many jackals say they are lions. In this case, it may have been a hawk, but it could have been a buzzard. Quite certain it wasn’t an eagle and it certainly wasn’t playing in the wind, at least not in any normal sense. Buzzard roadkill sometimes proclaims it is a soaring eagle.

Got It Made, Currency, AX15349F



Got It Made

6.1 x 2.6 inches [dimensions of a dollar bill]

frozen paint on paper

\$100

I usually don't sign pieces on the front – it seems an egotist mark that distracts from the work, but here I do so, mocking the practice of certain government officials' signatures somehow adding “credibility” to the value of fiat money.

Currency

6.1 x 2.6 inches [dimensions of a dollar bill]

frozen paint on paper

\$100

AX15349F

6.1 x 2.6 inches, [dimensions of a dollar bill]

frozen paint on paper

\$100

El-Ahrairah on the Down



detail

El-Ahrairah on the Down

24 x 18 inches
acrylic and hydrangea visibly absent
on paper
NFS

El-Ahrairah is the main mythical figure for the rabbit characters in *Watership Down*, one of several Arabic-inspired names or ideas in what initially seems like a distinctly English text. The work seems like a children's book, but it's actually about the search for a decent society.

Executing Birth



Executing Birth 2017

40 x 30 inches

acrylic on canvas, flora visibly absent
NFS

Made on April 9, 2017, my dad's birthday, shortly after he died on January 27 of that year. April 9 was always a tough day for my dad's birthday, as the "anniversary" of the Deir Yassin massacre in 1948, and, then, perhaps coincidentally, the fall of Baghdad in 2003. This piece is an early work featuring a larger structure rather than simply scattered flora. In this case, the viewer looks "through" a weeping willow.

Fruits of Cancer



Fruits of Cancer

24 x 18 inches
acrylic on paper
\$1,500

Shortly after my partner Emily and I began dating, she was diagnosed with colorectal cancer. One consequence of this was that when we were on a drive, she'd have to go to the bathroom for a long time. At first, I'd be frustrated, but then I'd simply take this as an opportunity to observe nature, especially if we were at a state park or such, but after a while, I started doing art with the natural materials.

Future Flag



Future Flag:
Resurrected Bird Takes Flight and Eats
the Maggots that Were Feeding Off It
2017

40 x 30 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$4,000

Gain-of-Function



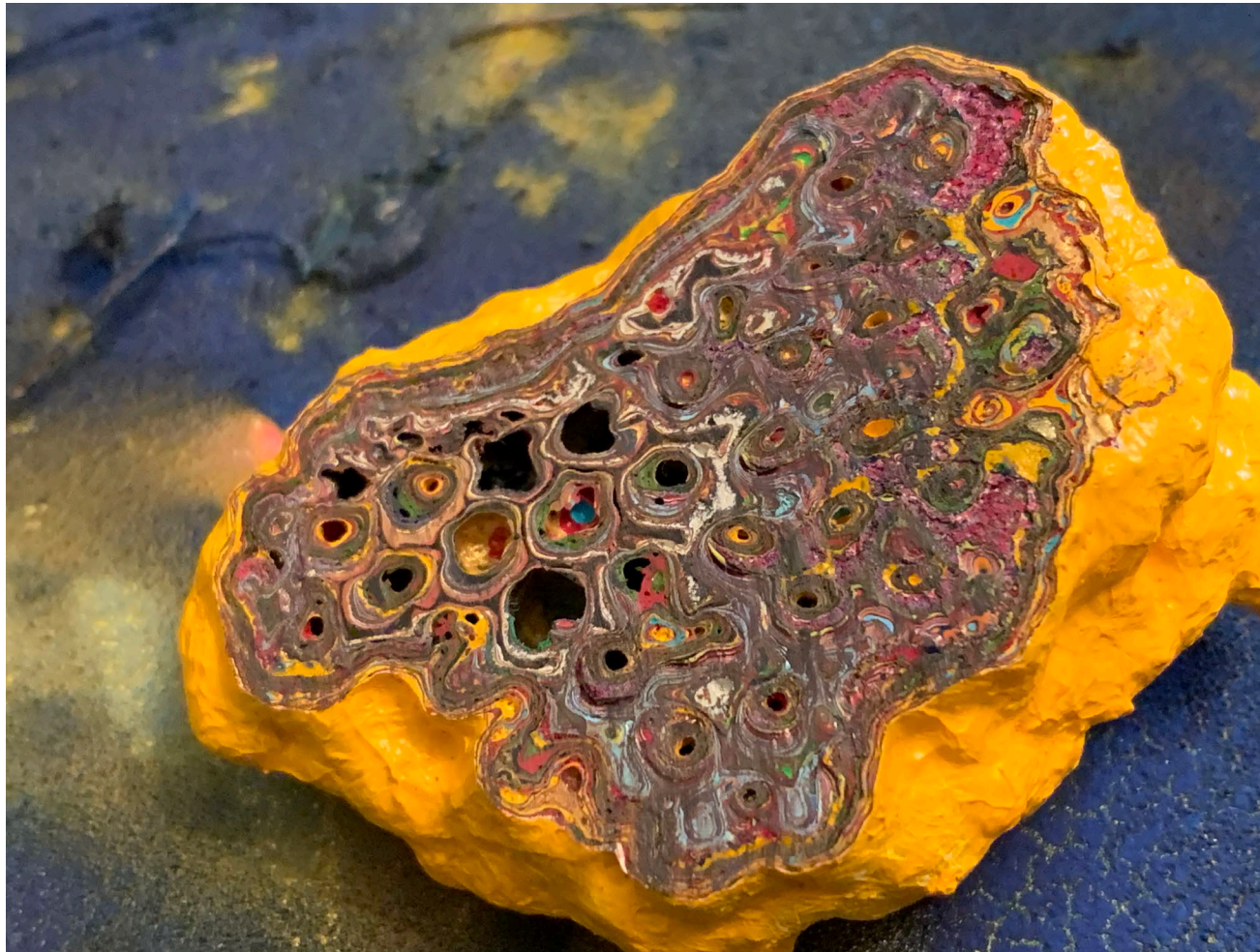
Gain-of-Function 2020
48 x 36 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$6,000

“Gain-of-function” is a euphemism for biological lab work that makes dangerous pathogens more lethal, like making a deadly virus more easily transmissible – airborne. It’s also called the creation of [Potentially Pandemic Pathogens](#) in the scientific literature. Discussion of these issues has been notably absent, or deformed, during the current pandemic, [something](#) I have [attempted](#) to [remedy](#). This type of work is justified as “biodefense” so that “we” will be able to anticipate what “the terrorists” or “Nature” might throw at us. This illustrates how institutional power is often maintained by playing off scare tactics that smear cultures deemed “the other” – or Nature, in a sense, the ultimate “other”. But some lab work has itself become a threat, with the U.S. government proliferating biowarfare lab work since the 2001 anthrax attacks, which were a [“false flag”](#) attack – presented as coming from nefarious [“Arabs/Muslims”](#) when they actually originated from a U.S. government or allied lab. Since 2001, largely outside of public view, the U.S. government has sparked a bioweapons arms race that China, Russia, Britain and France and other countries are all now likely engaged in despite having signed the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention. Israel hasn’t even signed the treaty. With this larger piece, some of my artistic capacities are “gaining function” as I “use” Nature for my own conflicted ends. So it is also about staying mindful that with what power someone may accumulate, they must ensure (self) examination. Indeed, doing so should be a critical *function*.



detail

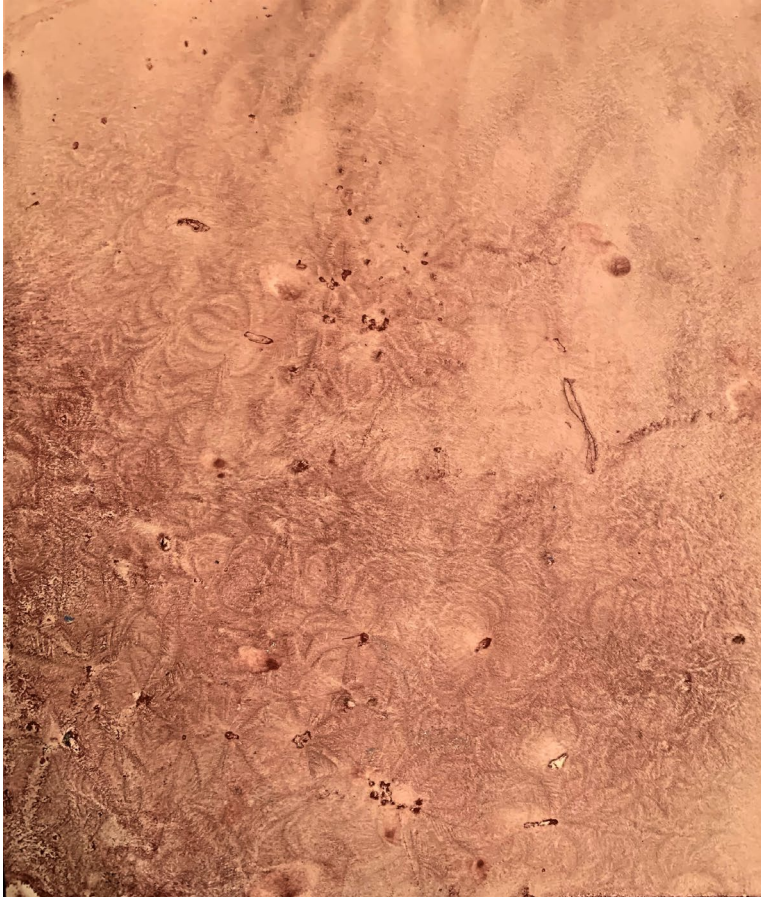
Honeycomb



Honeycomb

3 x 1.5 x 1 inches
acrylic on honeycomb
NFS, Work in progress.

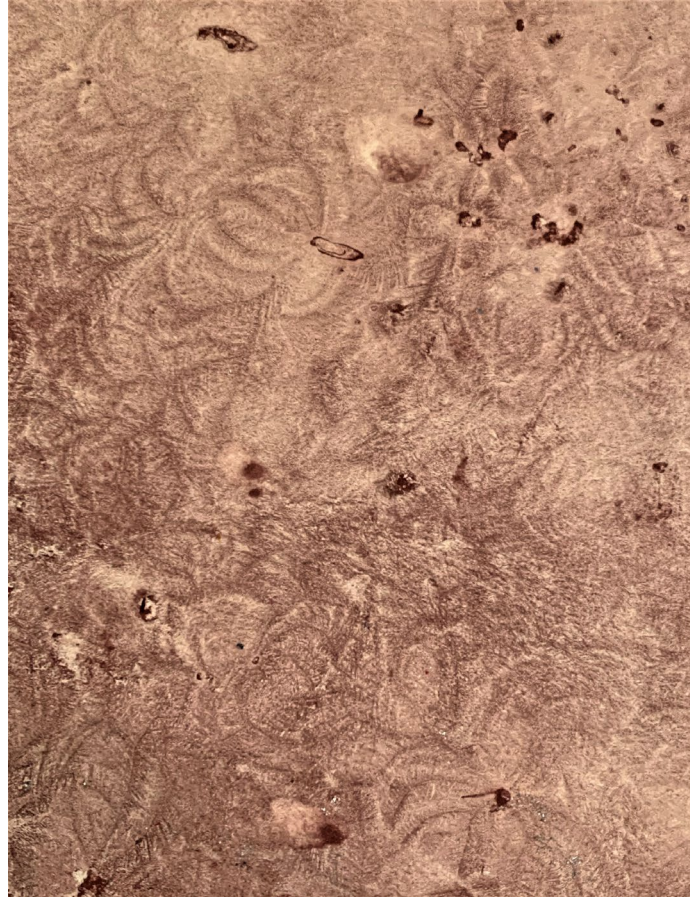
Two Iced Arabic Coffees



Iced Arabic Coffee

8 x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches
paint on paper
\$250

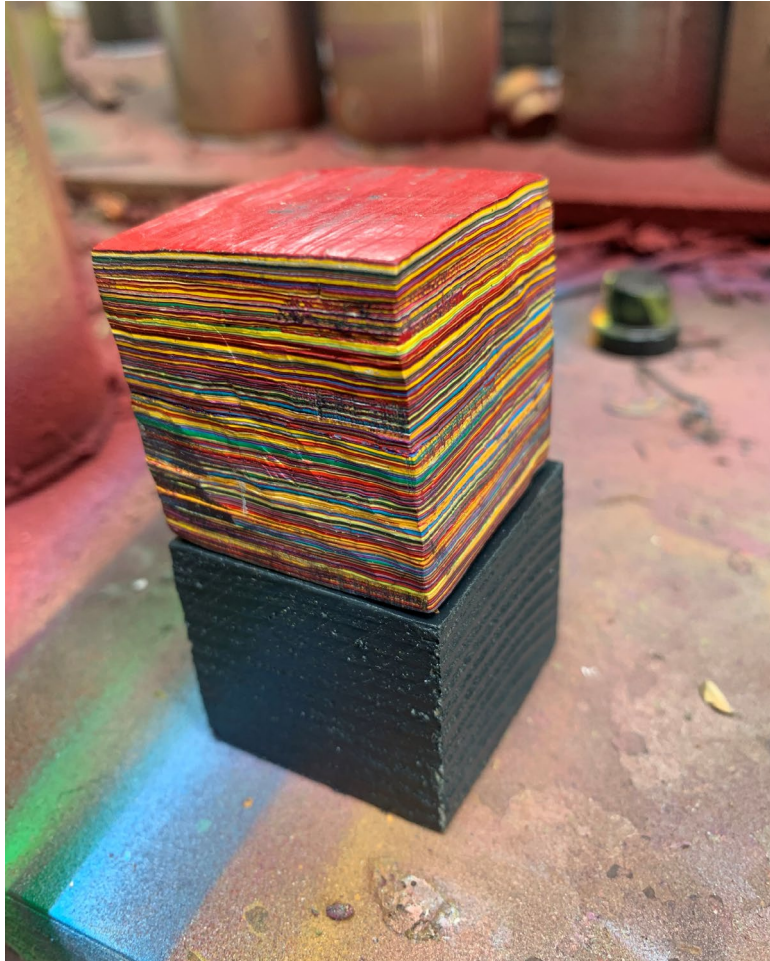
Natural manifestations can take place inside the home, as in the patterns I'd see my mother and other Arabic women "read" at the bottom of a cup of Arabic coffee.



Iced Arabic Coffee 2

8 x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches
paint on paper
\$250

Layers



Layers 1989

17/16 x 1 7/16 x 1 7/16 inches
acrylic all the way down, here atop painted
wooden block
NFS

The motivation for this at the time was to
give form and substance to the layers I saw:
Both the layers of lies and the layers of
beauty.

Kernel of an Honest Holocaust Memorial



Kernel of an Honest Holocaust Memorial 2016 - 2020

2 x 1 1/4 x 3/8 inches

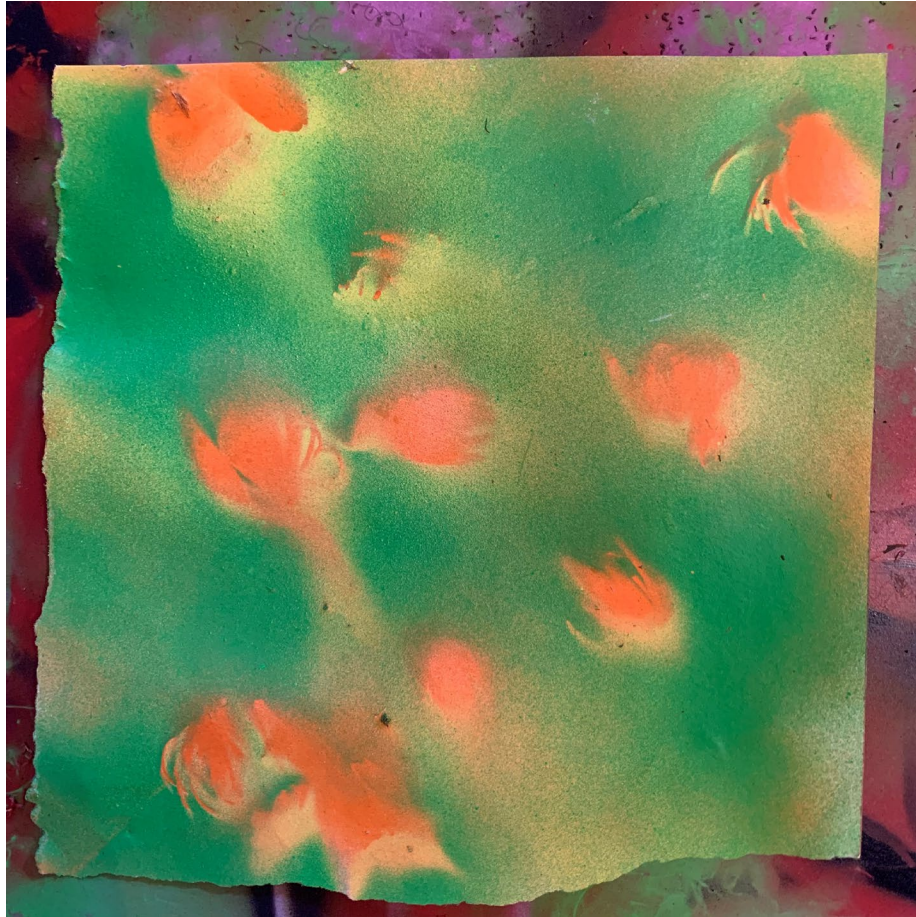
acrylic-petrified snowflake on matchbox

NFS

My first preservation of snowflakes -- whether subconscious or by happenstance -- were done with yellow paint, just before [Holocaust Memorial Day in 2016](#). Of course, Jews were forced to wear six sided stars by the Third Reich. Here, one of those preserved snowflakes is mounted on a matchbox I picked up from Bellevue, a noted Russian restaurant in Helsinki.

A snowflake is a clichéd, but true, reference to the uniqueness of each person -- and it resembles a spark. A matchbox is an allusion to the lighting of ovens, to the tinderbox of potential nuclear disaster, an increasingly likely coming Holocaust -- and to myself being thrown in a box.

Landing Upright: Before the Tree is Fallen

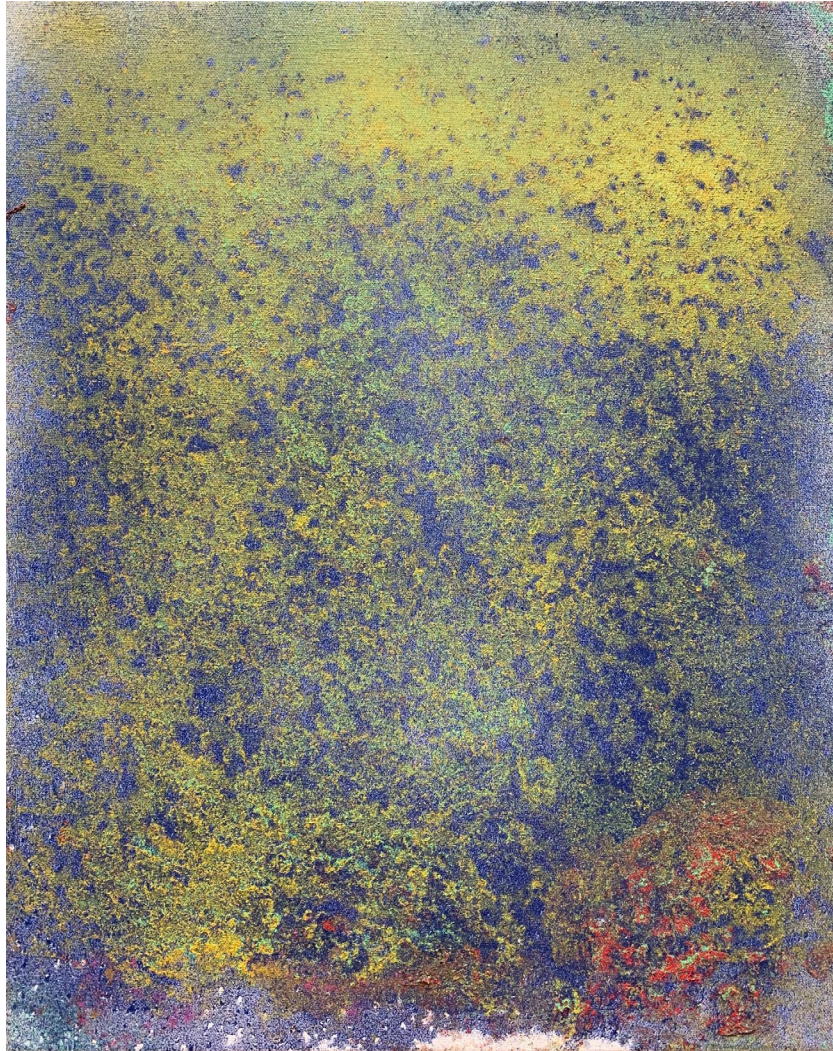


Landing Upright: Before the Tree is Fallen

10 x 10 inches
acrylic on paper
NFS

This piece was inspired by a tulip poplar tree blossom which fell from a tree and landed upright. Soon after, the tree itself was cut down.

Impression



Impression

16 x 20 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$1,500

This vertical snow piece harkens back to the famed artistic school.

Is the Return Message



Is the Return Message

24 x 18 inches

frozen paint on paper

\$3,000

This piece is based on the Rumi poem "[Love Dogs](#)" about a man losing faith because he thought his pleadings to God were never answered. He was met in a dream by Khidr, the guide of all souls, and is told that the agonizing longing in his heart is itself the return message he has sought.

Long Time Ago



Long Time Ago When Grass Was Greener
on the Other Side

24 x 18 inches
acrylic on paper
\$1,500

Breathe



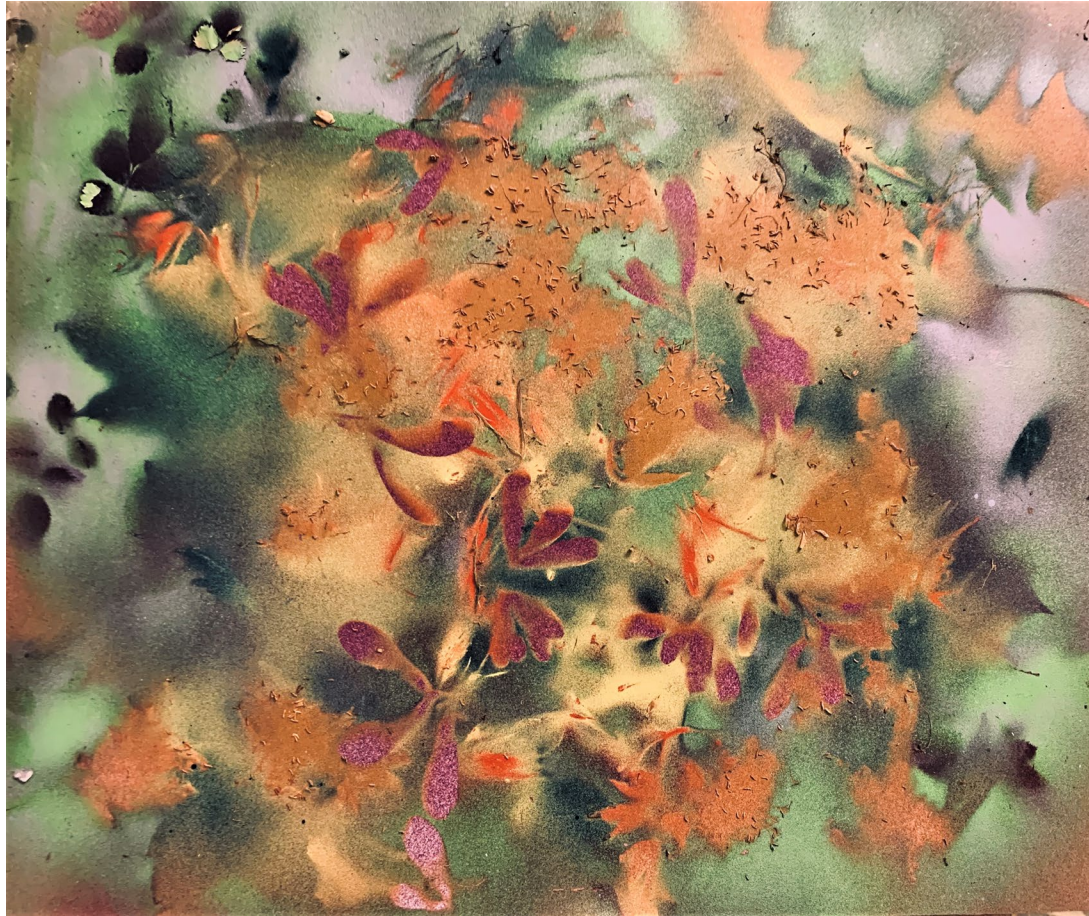
Breathe 2019

14 3/4 x 9 inches

acrylic on visibly hidden air conditioner evaporator and spider webs
\$8,000

I'd bought the air conditioning part at a scrap yard over a decade ago, knowing I'd wanted to do something with it but without knowing what. A great influence on me has been the music of Phil Ochs — especially his song "Changes" — a poignant song about Nature, mortality and intimacy with the opening line: "Sit by my side, come as close as the air." But of course, we breathe in the air. And given our artificial environment and HVAC systems, even it is increasingly artificial, with some scientists now arguing that such systems are becoming an increasing threat to us as an airborne pandemic rages on. Here, I painted the object as close as the air and then hand sanded it down as finely as possible, so what was covered up became intimately apparent in a new way. An object that is rather artificial has artificial substances added to it and is artificially manipulated, but somehow harkens to a natural process, giving a measure of hope — allowing us to breathe.

Manna from Heaven



Manna from Heaven 2016

17 x 14 inches
acrylic on paper
\$500

Night in the City



Night in the City 2019

40 x 30 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$3,000

Contrary to cliché, a modern city at night is often in a white haze.

Miniature Arboretum



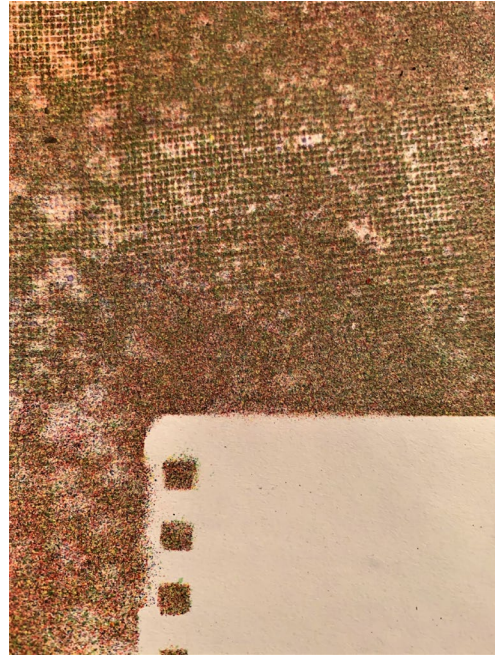
Miniature Arboretum 2018

14 x 11 inches
acrylic on paper
\$400

Notebook Learning from Nature



details

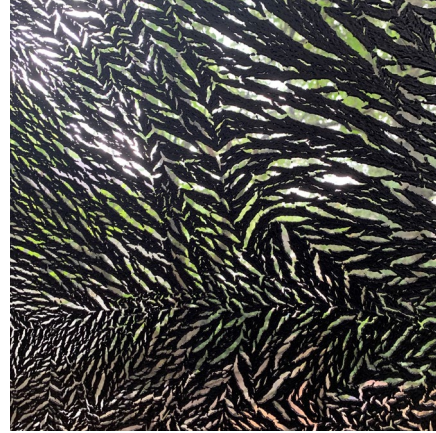


Notebook Learning from Nature
2016

17 x 14 inches
acrylic on paper
\$300

Here, I'm trying to learn that
Nature is a closed system,
containing no waste. The
negative space from a screen
piece becomes a piece.

Old Master's Brushstrokes



detail

Old Master's Brushstrokes 2020

28 ¼ x 29 inches
frozen paint on window glass
acrylic on glass
\$6,000

While many talk about the “Old Masters” — I’ve attempted to follow the oldest and greatest Master of all. Like much of my art, this is inspired by the Taoist work Tao Te Ching:

*The Master does nothing,
yet he leaves nothing undone....
A good artist lets his intuition
lead him wherever it wants.
A good scientist has freed himself of concepts
and keeps his mind open to what is.
Thus the Master is available to all people
and doesn't reject anyone.
He is ready to use all situations
and doesn't waste anything.
This is called embodying the light.*

Resolver



Resolver (Natural Light) 2017-2020

3 3/4 x 5 3/4 inches

acrylic on found crushed beer can

NFS

Compulsions to control nature cause alienation, deaden our sense of wonder about the world, leading us to find escapism in addictive substances and behavior. But even the refuse of such behavior is itself wondrous if actually looked at with clear eyes. This piece also acts as resolution to competing schools of art -- effectively making a work like [Jasper Johns' "Ale Cans"](#) at one with [abstract expressionist works](#).

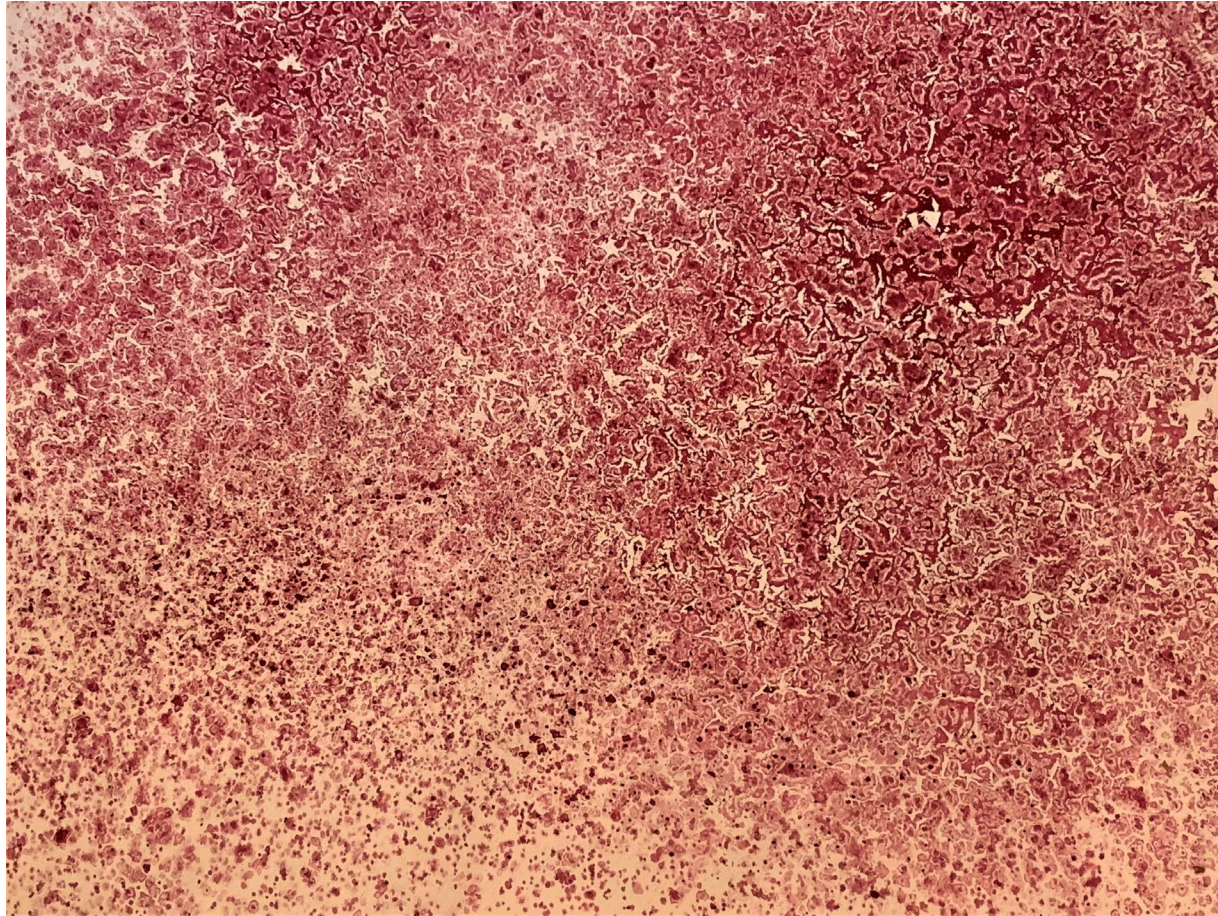
Purple Riverwalk



Purple Riverwalk 2019

24 x 18 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$1,500

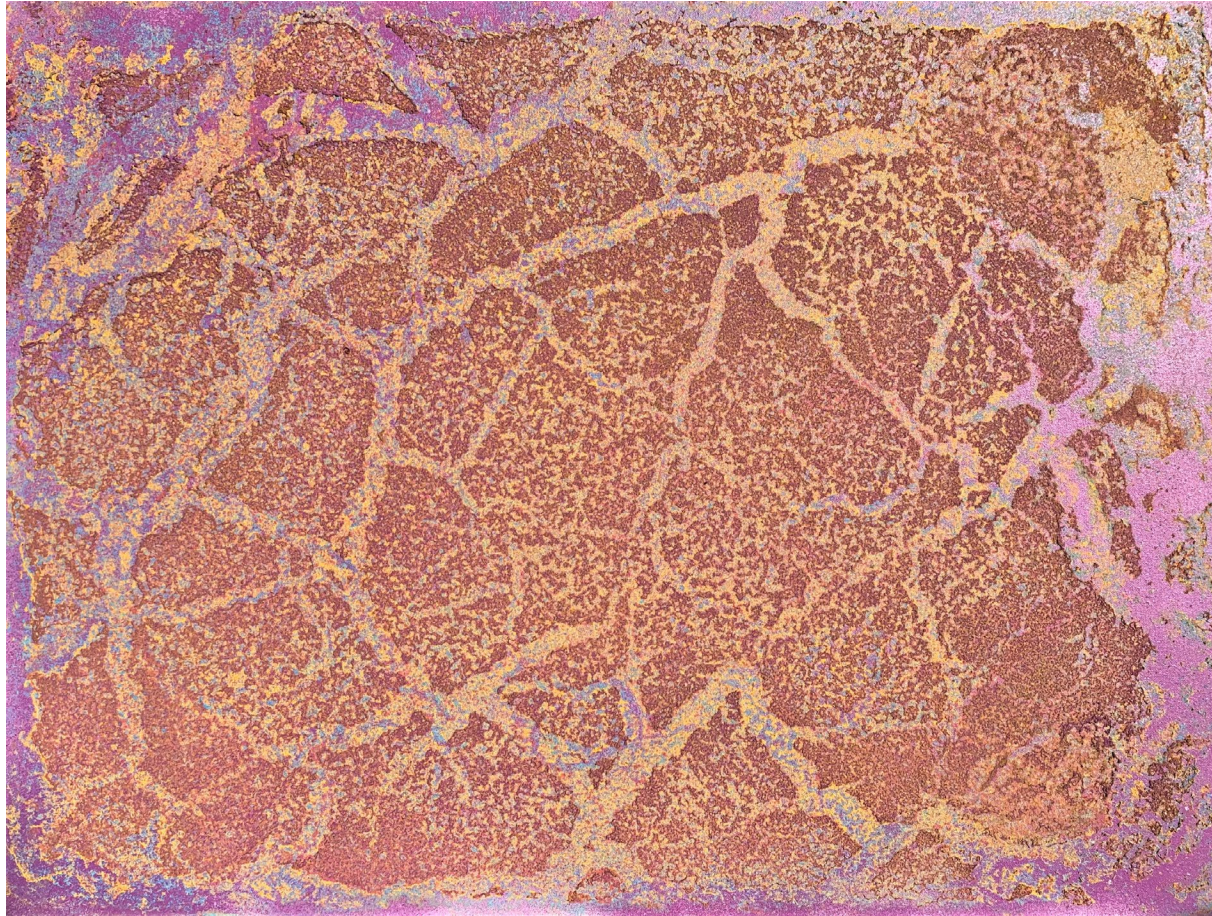
Red Frozen Brain



Red Frozen Brain

14 x 11 inches
acrylic on paper
\$300

Release



Release 2019

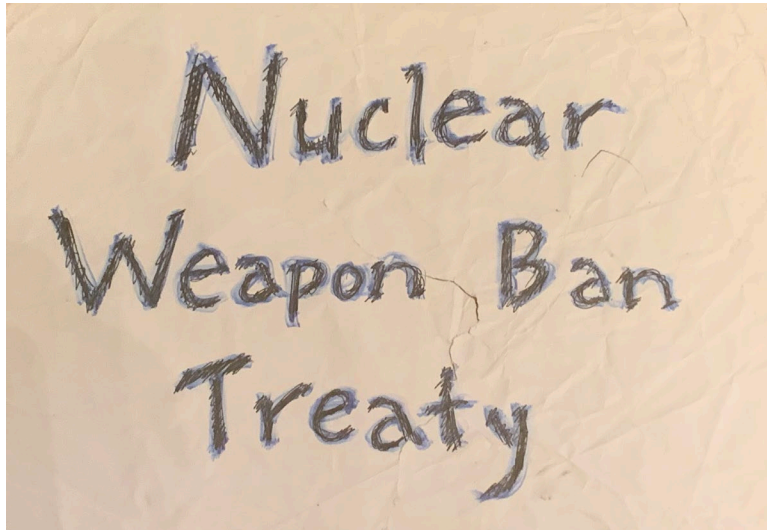
40 x 30

acrylic on canvas

\$4,000

One major aspect of the "breaking up" snow pieces is an analogy to the notion of being emotionally present and allowing your feelings and events flow naturally -- to release, to let go.

This is not a Protest Sign



This is not a Protest Sign

8 x 11 1/2 inches

pen and marker on paper

NFS

While covering the Trump-Putin summit in Helsinki in July 2018, I attempted to get a substantial question in by holding up this sign: "Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty" -- a reference to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which 122 countries had backed at the United Nations, but was being attacked by the US government and virtually all of its NATO proxies, Israel as well as Russia. (Other nuclear weapons states China, India and Pakistan abstained. North Korea actually voted for the resolution.) I also aimed to ask about the US government's refusal to [acknowledge Israel's nuclear weapons arsenal](#), as exposed by Mordechai Vanunu. Another reporter who saw me making the sign falsely told the security officials I was planning a protest. Despite my attempts to explain what I was doing, I was eventually dragged out of the hall, thrown in the back of a police van and locked up by Finnish authorities until around midnight, when the media centers closed. I still managed to get much of my [story out in the following days](#).

Rust



Rust

20 x 24 inches

acrylic on canvas, snow visibly absent

\$1,500

Riverdale



Riverdale 2019

40 x 30 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$5,000

This is an exceptionally successful
use of floral structures.

Water and Ice



Water and Ice

14 x 11 inches
paint on paper
\$200

Three Leaves



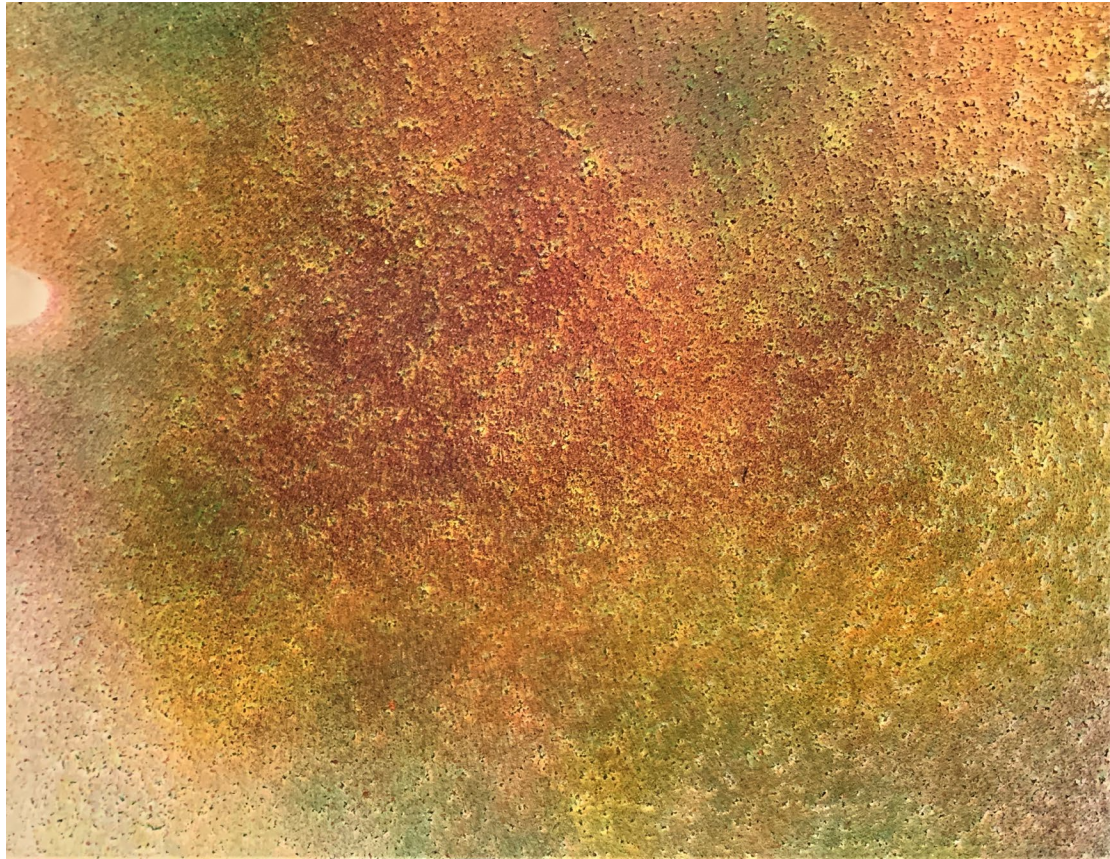
Three Leaves

24 x 18 inches

acrylic with leaves and snow visibly absent

\$1,000

Signed Snow



Signed Snow

14 x 11 inches
acrylic on paper
\$300

Seminal



Seminal

14 x 11 inches

acrylic on paper, Samaras visibly absent
\$500

Made on May 23, 2018, the day after Philip Roth died. What began as a whimsical joke became a meditation on fertility.

Terror of Spring



Terror of Spring 2018

40 x 30 inches
acrylic on paper
\$4,000

Spring is seen as a time of birth, but the onslaught of waves of life can be overwhelming, in part because it also includes a great deal of death.



details

Remembering That Glorious Dream



Remembering That Glorious Dream 2019

24 x 18 inches
acrylic on paper
\$3,000

An unusually successful layered flora piece.

Accelerate



The Vista I See Now Is Changing

30 x 40 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$3,000

This piece involves a style of painting that uses snow, but the canvas is close to vertical, as most traditional painters have a canvas rather than horizontal, which is how most of my snow pieces are made. While making a painting, I sometimes have a song about something I'm feeling go through my head and that animates me. In this case, it was about choices and the song was "Accelerate" by REM:

Sinking fast, the weight chained to my feet

No time to argue with belief ...

Where is the ripcord, the trapdoor, the key?

Where is the cartoon escape-hatch for me?

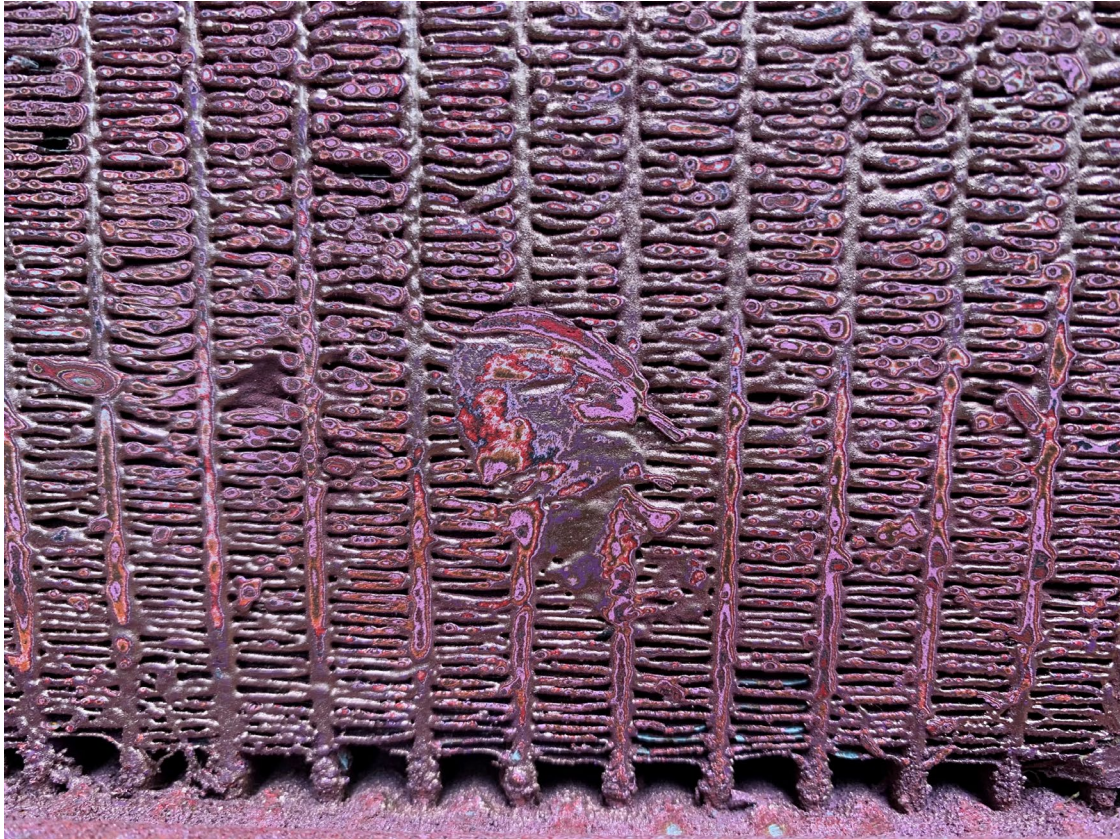
No time to question the choices I make ...

I've got to follow another direction ... Accelerate

The vista I see now is changing

Uncertainty is suffocating ...

Purpose of the Petroleum Age: Bessie's Bosom



Purpose of the Petroleum Age: Bessie's Bosom 2020

31 x 23 inches

acrylic on car radiator with samaras and spider webs
NFS, Work in progress

Made from the old radiator of our car, "Bessie". This adds another layer of irony on the notion of the "petroleum age" in that it not only is made from plastics, but also from auto parts. It's also about the irony of people forming an emotional bond with their cars. Most of the colors used are either of "Bessie" or a female breast. It's about comfort and freedom.

Blinding



Blinding 2017

24 x 18 inches
acrylic on paper
\$1,000

Gold in the Darkest Blue



Gold in the Darkest Blue 2016

18 x 24

acrylic on canvas

NFS

This is inspired by the song "Fallen Down Moon"

Makin' out with Judas

Just to make your bail

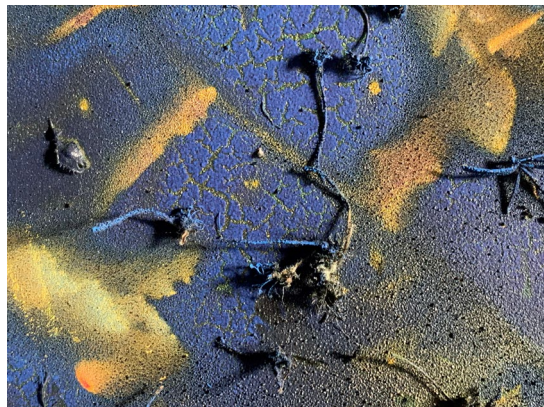
We do shit like that

Just before we crack

But there's splendor in the cracks

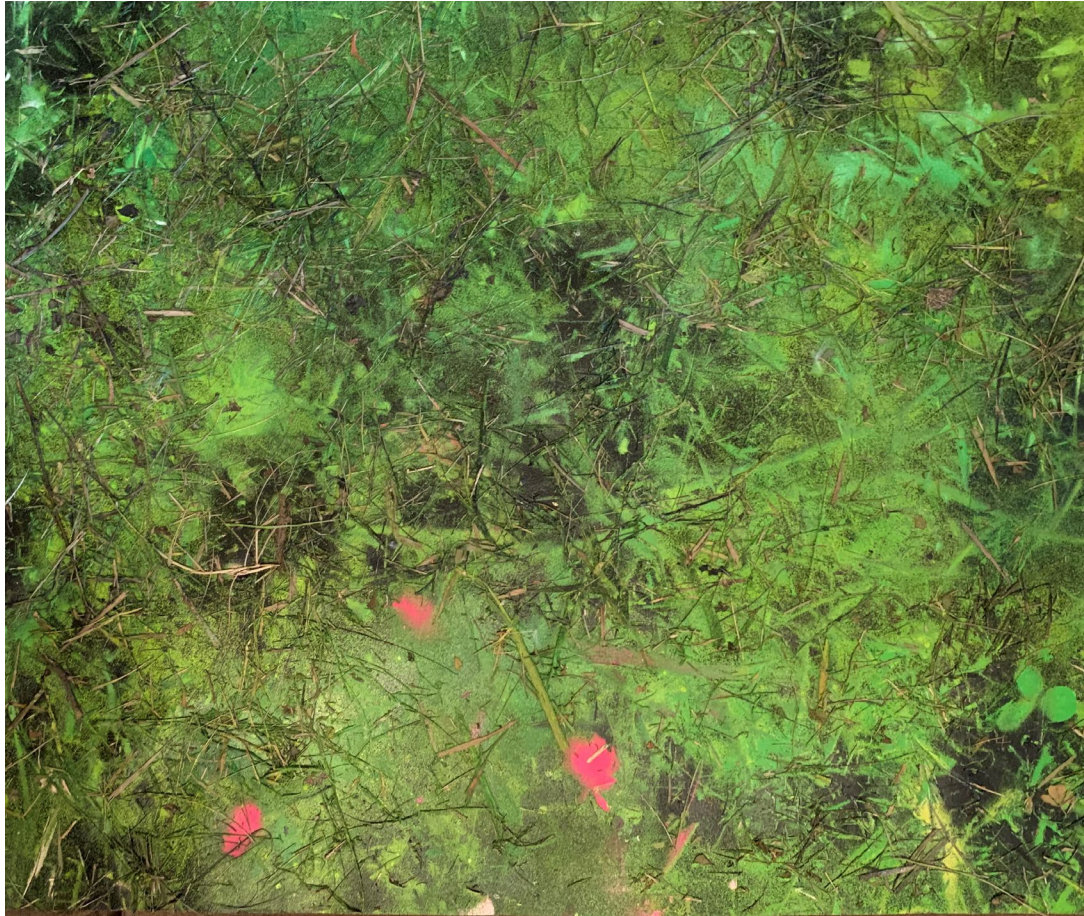
And gold in the darkest blue

The piece has many more layers than an initial glance would indicate, causing the "cracks" that appear in parts of it, both fulfilling the title and relating to the "snow breaking up" pieces.



detail

Irish Famine 4



Irish Famine 4

17 x 14 inches

acrylic and grass with flora visibly absent on paper
\$2,000

Made in Dingle, Ireland, 2019

Most people who celebrate St. Patrick's Day by eating food dyed green are unaware of the origins. [Christine Kinealy](#), a scholar of the Irish Famine notes that "Irish folk memory refers to the Famine dead as having 'mouths stained green' — because their last meal was often grass."

The Fountain



The Fountain

24 x 18 inches

acrylic on paper, rain visibly absent

\$1,000

Like a Sailboat



Like a Sailboat 2019

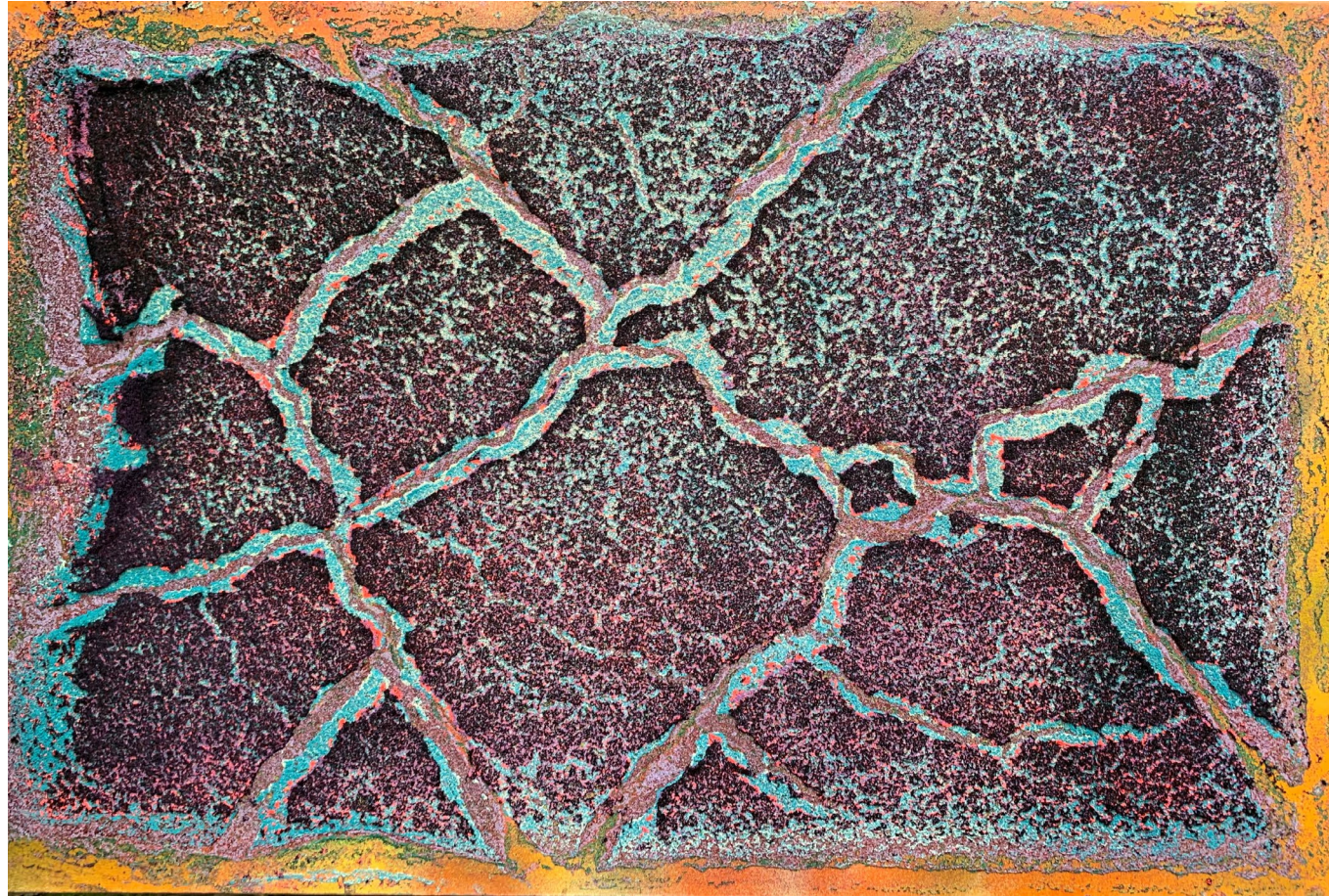
16 x 11 3/4 inches

acrylic on canvas panel

NFS

"Traditional" art is like a rowboat: "Stroke, stroke, stroke." Much of modern art is like a motorboat: automated. I liken my art to being "like a sailboat" -- to work with Nature. This piece simply takes a canvas layered with paint and scrapes it down, creating a scene of a sailboat on shimmering water.

Outside In



Outside In 2019

36 x 24 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$6,000

This especially successful snow painting brought home how the patterns it shows can simultaneously depict tiny veins -- or a distant planet. Such art brings the wonders of the outside world — where they are created — in.

What Leaves Leave



What Leaves Leave 2014

24 x 18 inches

leaf prints on canvas

\$1,000

Spending most of my days in downtown Washington, D.C. for years left me longing for the most minute traces of Nature, so my eyes would dart around for shadows, reflections, even discarded chewing gum on the sidewalks -- and imprints as here. In the autumn, leaves leave their mark on squeaky clean D.C. sidewalks. No matter how much concrete is poured, Nature finds a way to be heard. This is also an example of the Taoist principle of "doing nothing but leaving nothing undone." Simply allowing the leaves to make their mark, to let the poetry speak without getting in the way.

Snow Window/Splendor in the Cracks



Snow Window / Splendor in the Cracks

24 x 18 inches
acrylic on canvas
\$2,000

This smaller snow piece is unusual in that light shines through the "cracks" — rather like a reverse stained glass window.

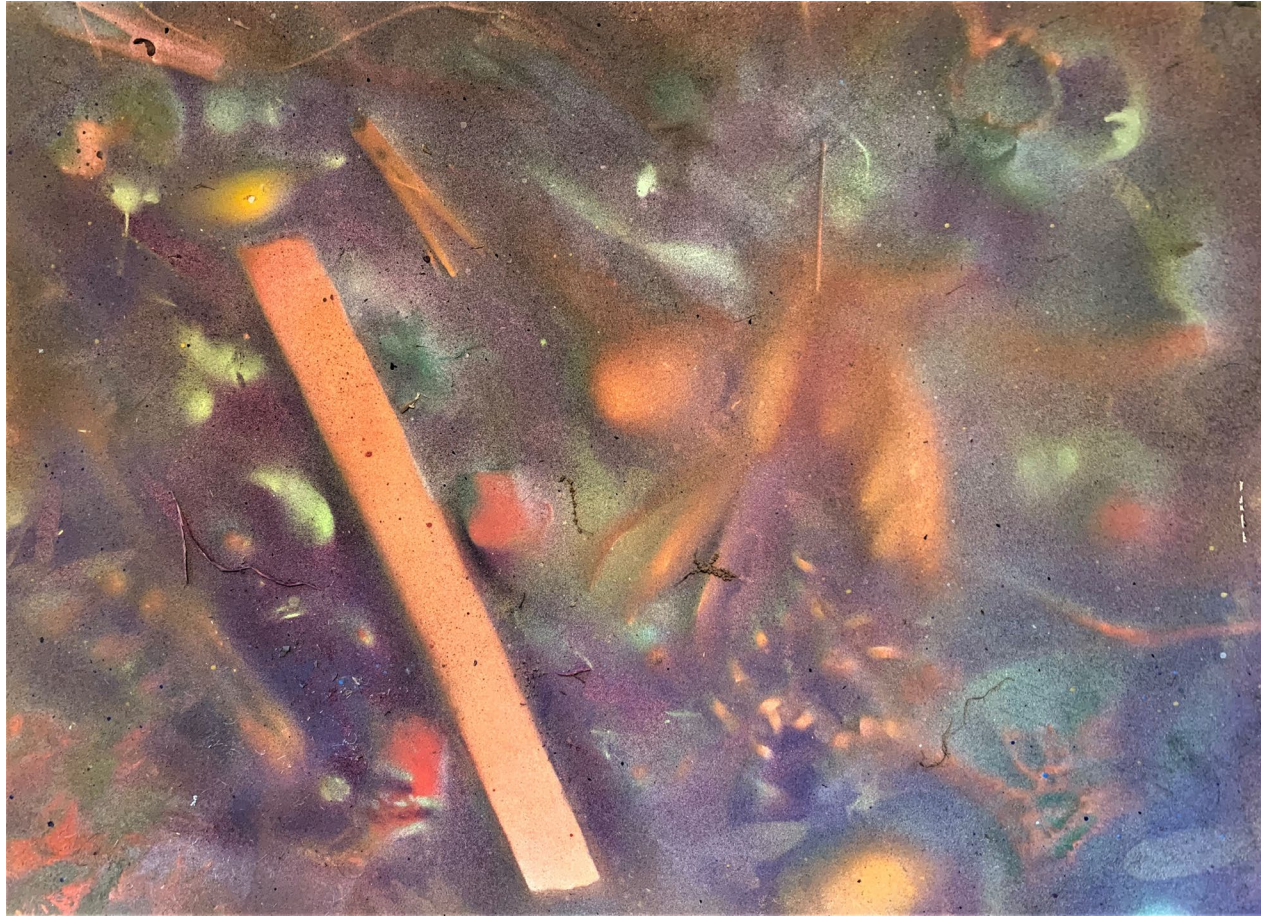
Makloubeh (Upside Down)



Makloubeh (Upside Down)

14 x 17 inches
acrylic on paper
\$200

Wəd



Wəd 2017

24 x 18 inches
acrylic on paper
\$2,000

This was a meditation on my
using flora and how different
forms of wood are processed
in different ways, as people
would choose.

Catcher in the Rye



details

The Catcher in the Rye 2016

25 x 39 inches

acrylic on window

screen, snowflakes visibly absent

\$4,000

Some of my first snow pieces were done on screens. This was motivated by two things: One was trying to preserve snowflakes, the other was the folk tradition in Baltimore of painting "nature scenes" on [screen windows](#). This piece was for years in the guest bedroom in my home where the morning sun would hit it to beautiful effect.

Landslide



Landslide 2016

24 x 18 inches

acrylic on paper snow visibly absent

NFS

This was made along with "Distant Map", but it literally fell as I brought it into the house. This is an extreme example of the idea that -- especially when working with Nature -- there are no mistakes, you "let the poetry speak."

Knocking Jesus



Knocking Jesus c. 2008

17.5 x 22 inches

Collage

NFS

Jesus is of course typically depicted as "European looking". In 2002, *Popular Mechanics* published what purported to be an accurate, scientific picture of Jesus, here affixed to a widely reproduced print by Del Parson, a U.S. painter known for his Mormon themed paintings. Both my parents commented about how the "scientific" depiction of Jesus seemed "unattractive" to them. This raised the question of aesthetic standards and whether this "scientific" approach simply presented an allegedly authentic Jesus but simultaneously made this possibility "unappealing".

Sam Hussein Artist Statement

My art has many layers: of natural and artificial, of visible and hidden, of valueless and priceless, of image and object, of temporal and permanent -- and attempts to reconcile such seemingly intractable opposites, upending dominant assumptions in the process.

Painting is often like a rowboat: "stroke, stroke, stroke". A lot of modern art is like a motorboat: automated. In contrast to both, much of my art is like a sailboat: It works with Nature.

My art considers "natural" processes, and both incorporates and extends them. In so doing, it questions what constitutes "nature". That is, "artificial" objects that have a nature-like process iteratively applied to them in a sense become "natural" over time. "Natural" objects that are swallowed by the "artificial" aren't really still "natural." Human beings are central to both processes.

"Be that empty". We don't see the world till we see the negative. "Don't just admire the vase, drink the water." Don't just paint a canvas with the likeness of a flower, paint the flower itself. Paint it again. And again. Then, cut it open, like a ripened fruit and look inside. Like an animal devours a carcass. Don't just paint a likeness of the snow, paint the snow -- and the rain and samaras. They all fall like manna from heaven. Really look at what we are provided.

There's a theme of resolving issues of image and object; allowing a thing to speak for itself. After an object is layered over and over, it can be cut or sanded down and the underlying reality of the object -- no matter how extensively it was covered up -- will again assert itself even though the "object" itself may seem invisible. This can also be done with collections of objects through the "emptiness" which connects all things.

My art is of this world yet has an ethereal quality. It rejects "materialism" in the usual sense of the word -- showing the beauty of the negative space of an object itself regarded as valueless. But it is completely materialistic in that it is about truly seeing the "everyday" physical world before us that we often ignore or even deride. Many only experience freezing crystal structures as an annoyance on a car windshield they diligently scrape off. Such are rarely regarded as wonders to behold.

Artist Statement, continued

Part of the process for my art is being in touch with the primitive -- gathering flora and fauna to include in the work. Each season provides fresh material every year as it did for our ancestors.

Now, our society is remarkably divorced from Nature, at times virtually at war with it as huge effort is expended in attempting to control it -- often producing disaster and trauma. We should instead be at peace with Nature. It ultimately is constantly present, no matter how much some work to pretend otherwise.

There's a theme of the role of memory; an influence of photography, "capturing" a moment in time. Much of the work is inspired by shadows and reflections and imprints -- these are especially important to me because they make much of our modern cityscapes more bearable.

Some works make allusions to geology, seeming to extend far back in time. Other works show the most fleeting of objects. Both these extremes are seen -- sometimes in the same pieces -- in how I work with snow. Some snow pieces look like land masses. Some preserve the most ephemeral and delicate of objects -- a snowflake.

I draw freely from influences from a wide variety of artistic, philosophical and spiritual traditions, at times attempting to reconcile ostensibly competing "schools".

I attempt to manifest in microcosm that peace with nature our society needs -- accepting spontaneity rather than seeking control; allowing nature and intuition take hold through the art and letting a path "unfold".

I've sought to co-mission Nature as a collaborator. We need to get out of the way and "Let the poetry speak." We desperately need a re-alignment around our relationship with nature -- and then come to a better understanding of our true identities and our own Nature.

About Sam Hussein

Sam Hussein -- born Usamah Husayni in Amman, Jordan, to a Palestinian father and a Jordanian mother -- is an artist and writer currently living in Riverdale, Maryland. During the late 1980s, after receiving a degree in Math and Philosophy from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, he took sculpture classes in New York City. [During this time, he began his CompassRoses project -- painting compass roses in various places, writing at the time: "All places are holy. We are inter-connected. The compass rose is an immediate symbol of the fact that we are all on the same planet; simultaneously global and local."]

His interest in art continued in the following years and included photography in Washington, D.C., especially of the effects of nature on the Metro system in his "Concrete Expressionism" series, as well as during trips outside the U.S., including in Palestine. However, absorbed in media and politics, his painting and sculptural output was minimal until 2014 after moving to Riverdale.

He makes connections between his artistic and political work, seeking to reconcile the "Natural" with the "Artificial" in much of the former and "East" with "West" in aspects of the later. Similarly, he writes of seeing "layers of lies" in the political realm and "layers of beauty" in art and Nature. For more of his artwork, as well as writings about art, see: www.BeThatEmpty.org.