

Mental Landscape

EMBRACING ART AS AN
ORGANIC PROCESS

BY ALICE ROSS

Contemporary artist Kazaan Viveiros has been known to have as many as twenty pieces in various stages of completion at a time, often going so far as to leave pieces facing the wall of her Alexandria studio while she turns her attention to other works. “The only way to be productive is to put pieces away for a while,” she says.

And productive she is. Her portfolio, which features acrylic paintings, collages, illustrations and photographs, teems with complex images that juxtapose abstract, free-form shapes and detailed, realistic images, many with an environmental bent. Although there is plenty of realism—animals, plants and kitchen and garden implements, for example—Kazaan considers her work primarily abstract: “I don’t work out compositions before I start. I’ll just pick colors and throw paint on the canvas. It’s an organic process.

“The abstract elements allow me to work from intuition and play and experiment. Step-by-step realistic painting is not rewarding and enjoyable to me.”

Kazaan describes her work as “an exploration of perceptual relationships within the context of an evolving mental landscape. Each piece presents assembled images stemming from a rich library of personal and cultural references.... The images emerge slowly, appearing, disappearing, shifting and transforming, until the right combination manifests itself. Each work becomes a synthesis of elements forming ambiguous relationships within the picture plane.... The result is a quality texture, representing the creative process itself, revealing what time does to the surface of things.”

Many of Kazaan’s layered paintings incorporate her signature use of text as well as blocks of translucent color and geometric shapes paired with detailed landscapes or botanical studies. Some of the layers are known only to the artist. “There can be several paintings underneath the finished product,” she says. “And



what starts as a single piece can evolve into a diptych.”

The centerpiece and namesake of her current solo show at Alexandria’s Athenaeum, “Life and Death,” underwent numerous iterations before ultimately emerging as a large two-paneled work. In the final version, Kazaan employed acrylic, Conté crayon and pencil to anchor a quirky parade of birds, beasts and butterflies with a still life tableau. The arresting mélange of living—and formerly living—forms hints at the disparate mysteries and vagaries of nature.

A studio art and religious studies major at the University of Virginia, Kazaan went on to earn an M.F.A. in printmaking at the San Francisco Art Institute. Unable to afford an etching press of her own, she transitioned into other genres. Because she had never used color and had no formal brushwork or color theory experience, she had to experiment on her own with painting techniques. Sixteen years after making the switch, vestiges of her etching days remain, especially in Kazaan’s precise rendering of lines and forms.

“Appaloosa,” triptych, acrylic, Conté crayon on panel, 30” x 72”



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Kazaan acknowledges that her work is much looser these days: "I was told in school that I tended to be too detailed and refined—'too precious,' they said. It helps me to be messy and work intuitively and organically."

It's not unusual for Kazaan to revisit works: "If a piece hasn't sold, I might still look at it and say that it's a solid piece. But if I dislike a piece or think I can do something to improve it, I do. It's a way of recycling or combating the whole 'preciousness' thing. It's very freeing for me."

While she looks to the Old Masters for their draftsmanship, Kazaan cites two contemporary California artists, Squeak Carnwath and Robert Kelly, whose works have inspired her. She is drawn to Carnwath's "mental meanderings" and "stream-of-consciousness effects." Kelly's paintings, which are marked by a "fantastic sense of color," she says, "look like collages but with seamless, beautiful surfaces. He has a balance between complete precision along with free form and an almost accidental style."



Artist Kazaan Viveiros
Photograph by Kevin Blythe





A veteran of a dozen solo shows and 50-plus group exhibitions, Kazaan is anything but blasé about openings. Several of her shows have been installed at Page Bond Gallery, a contemporary venue in Richmond's Fan district. "When I bring work to the gallery, it's bright and clean, with high ceilings," she says. "It's fantastic. I'm sometimes worried about how the work will look, but the setting at Page Bond flatters every piece of work I've hung there."

Now Kazaan is mulling over several projects and some new subject matter. "I've been taking more photo-

graphs lately," she says, dividing her images into three broad areas: landscape, wildlife and travel images, most recently from a trip to Portugal. "I might incorporate them literally or use them as starting points for paintings."

In addition to Page Bond, Kazaan is represented by galleries in New York, Arizona and California. Her solo exhibition "Life and Death" continues at the Athenaeum through February 28. é

Kazaan Viveiros
www.kazaan.com

Above: "Burrowing Owl," acrylic, Conté crayon on panel, 36" x 32"

Opposite: "Blue Sea Grass," acrylic on panel, 40" x 30"