

A GHOULISH GOOD TIME: HALLOWEEN IN NORTHERN ARIZONA

SEDONA MONTHLY

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9

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this month*

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Spiders
reunion in
Camp Verde*

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You bet!*

A DIRTY WEEKEND

*Red Mud
Run
debuts in
Sedona*

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KAREN KOHTZ OPEN PORTFOLIO

W

hen Karen Kohtz says she's an extrovert, she is serious. Somewhat of a child prodigy when it came to art, the mixed-media painter realized early on that a solitary life spent in an art studio wasn't for her, so she went to cosmetology school. She owns a salon in Seattle, but after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, she realized she missed painting with acrylics as much as she enjoyed painting with hair dye. For the past 10 years, she's been jetting around the country, dividing her time between coloring hair in Seattle and painting in studios first in Sedona and, currently, in Virginia. The lifestyle appeals to the artist, whose biggest inspiration is the human spirit. Occasionally she'll start a painting by writing an encouraging quote on her wood panels, and she just began a series that incorporates sheet music of Chopin. The first gallery to exhibit Karen's work was Renee Taylor Gallery (336 SR 179 in Tlaquepaque Arts & Crafts Village; 928-282-7130), and she's been with the gallery for six years. To see more of Karen's work, visit www.reneetaylorgallery.com.

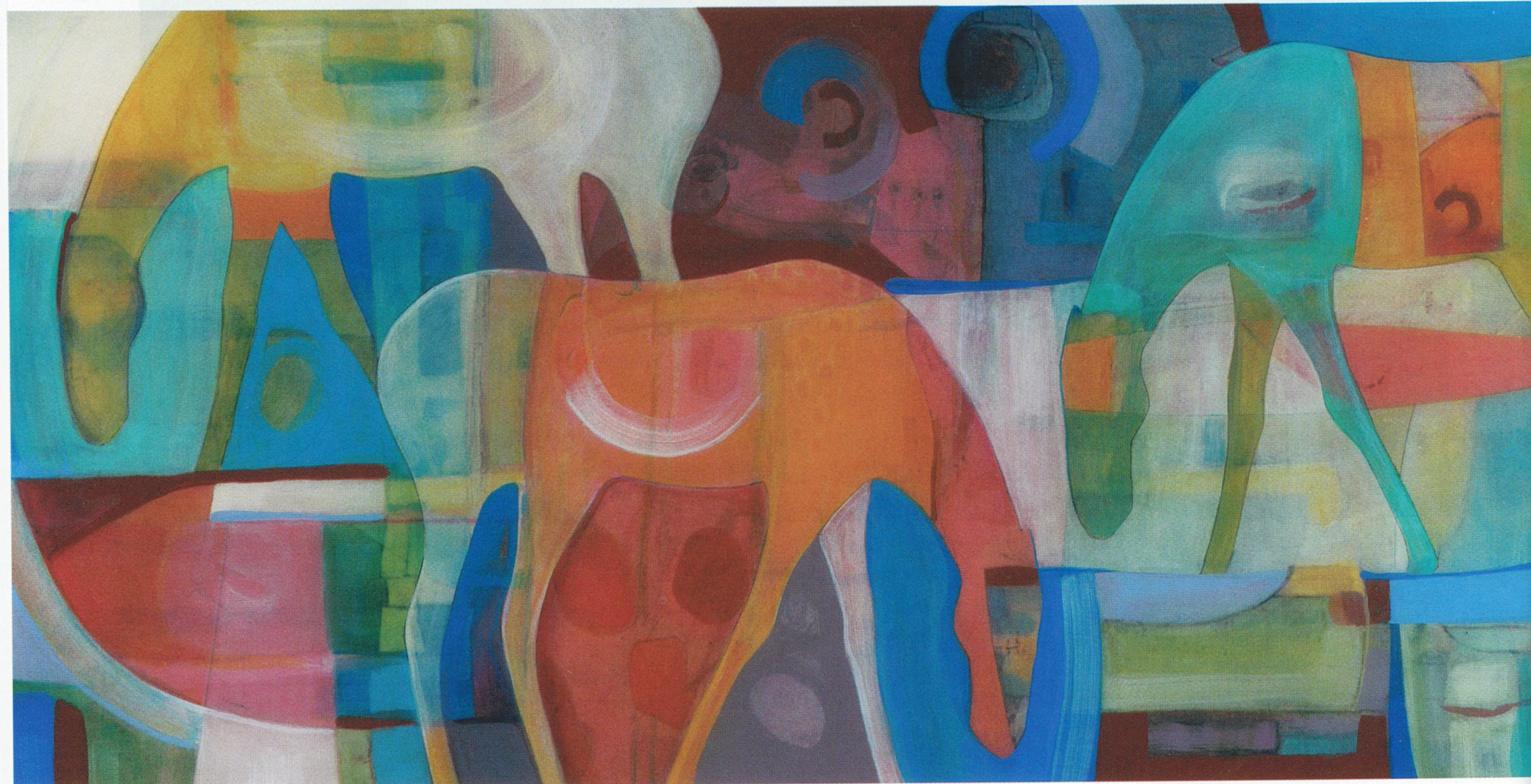
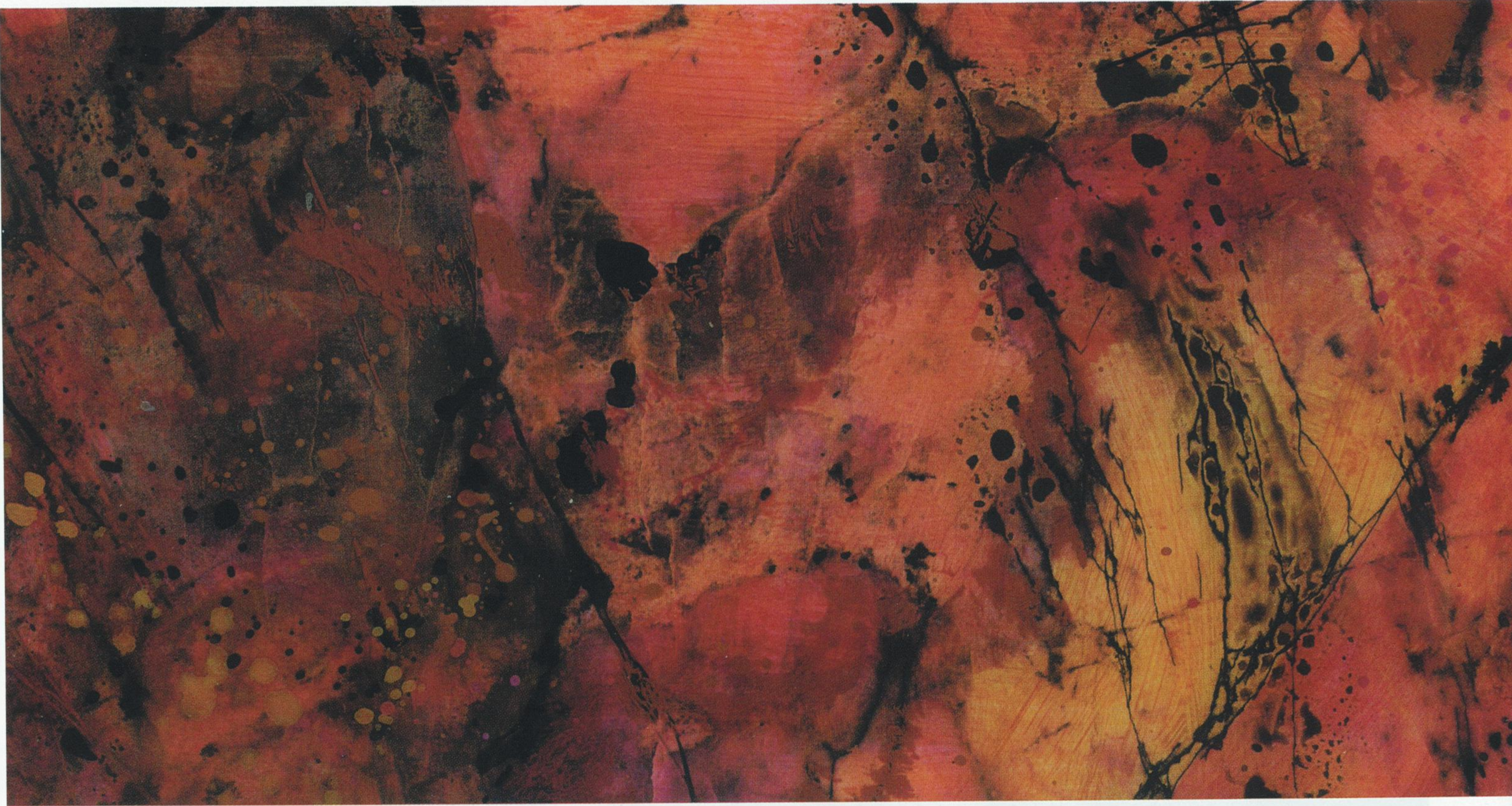


This page (top to bottom): Canyon Walls 1: Bryce Falls Opposite page (top to bottom): Reverse 1: Reverse 2: Reverse 3



Villa Gold

This page (top to bottom): *Canyon Walls 1*; *Blythe Butte*.
Opposite page (top to bottom): *Reverie 1*; *Reverie 2*; *Reverie 3*.



KAREN: “I was born in Michigan, and I was raised in Michigan, suburban Chicago and Virginia. I consider Virginia my home, though I don’t have a Southern accent, and my family is not Southern, either. In my 20s, I moved to Seattle, Washington, and I lived in Seattle for 25 years – a good half of my life. At the heart of things, I consider myself a northwesterner.

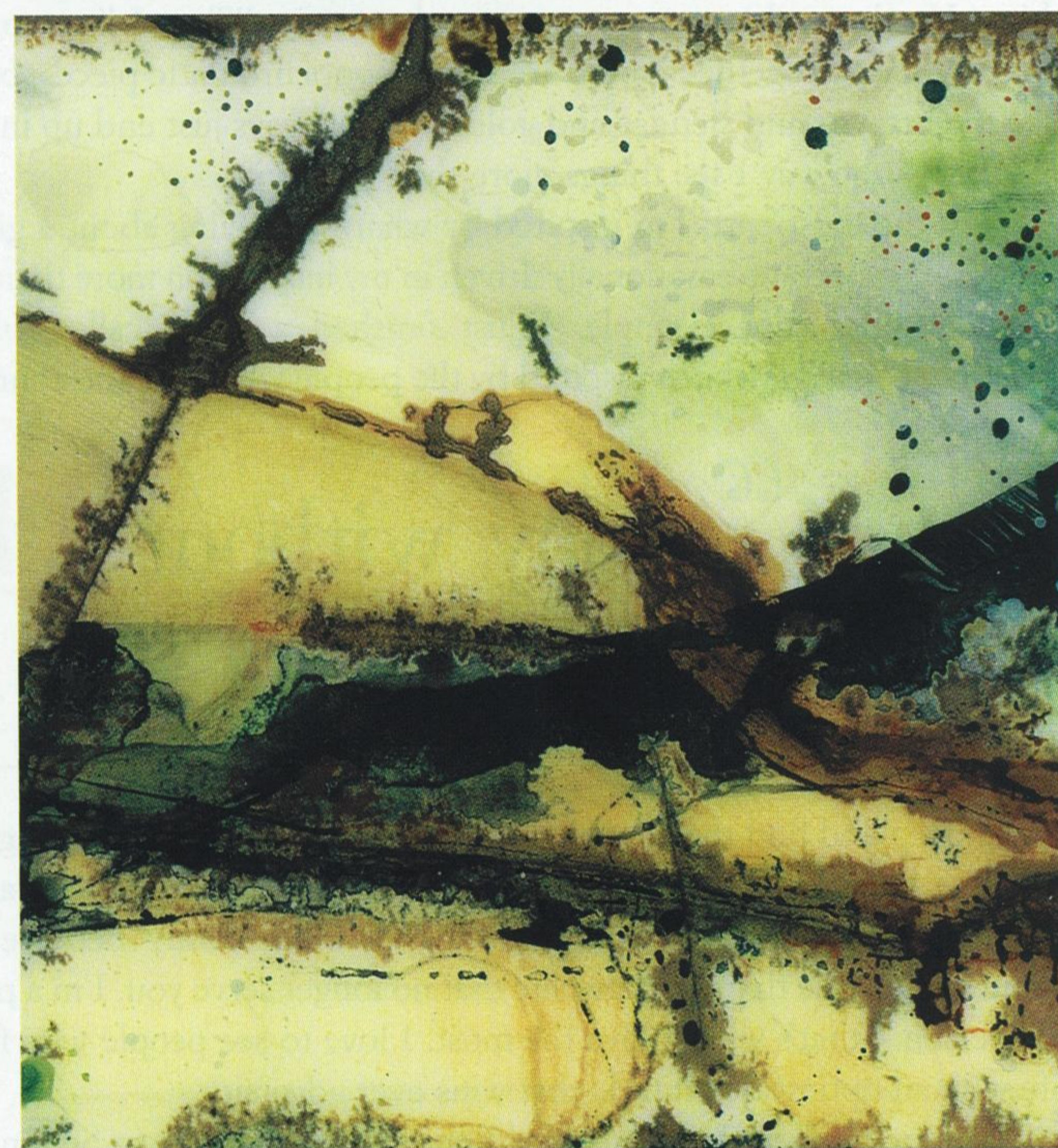
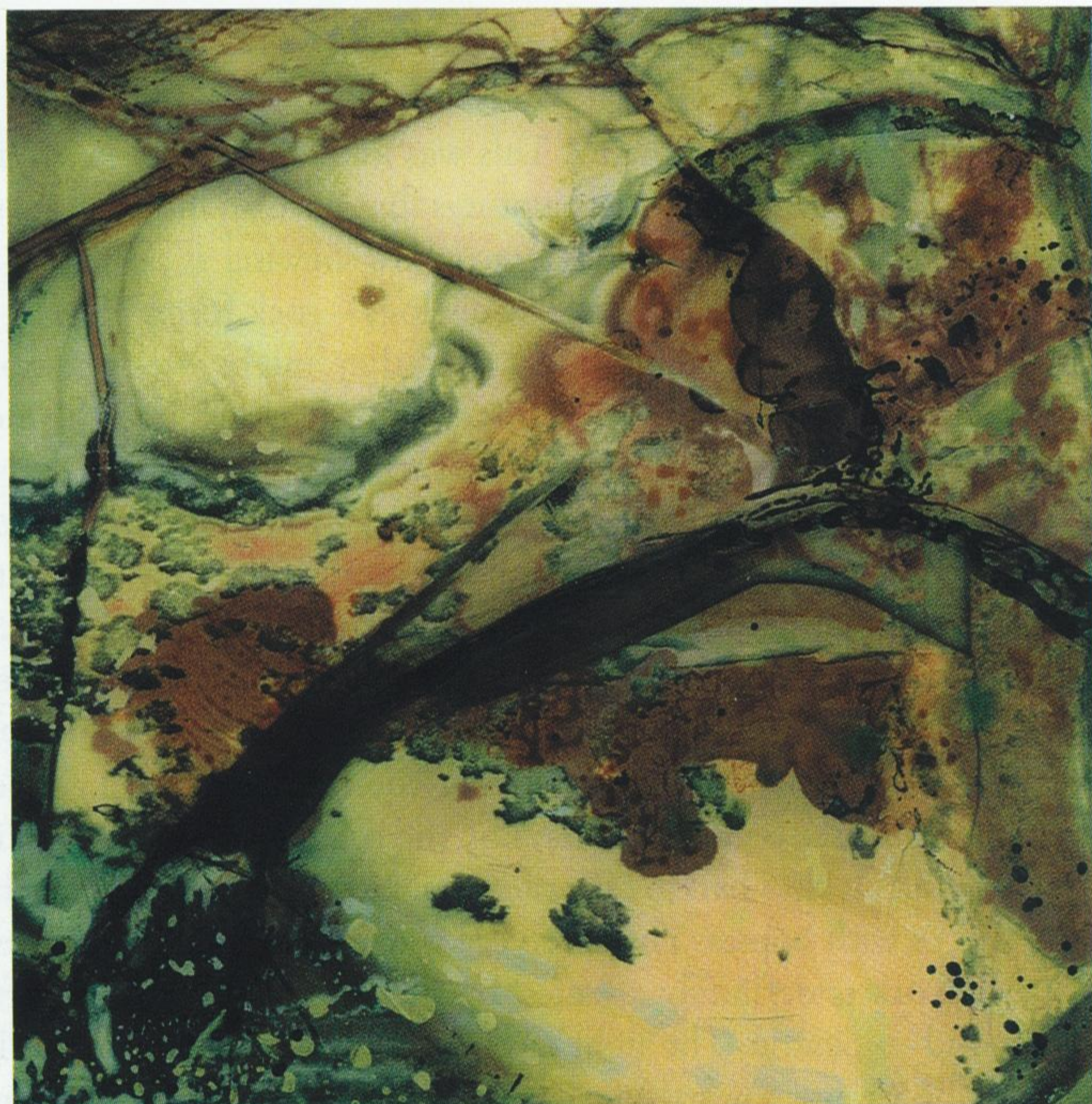
“My dad was a salesman, but he was a really creative thinker. He always colored outside the box. My mother is a very accomplished seamstress and designer. I definitely got my creative juices from her. She would disappear for hours, drafting patterns. In my world, the creative part of myself was encouraged and accepted. A lot of families steer their kids away from that, but not mine. They recognized that I had an artistic talent when I was young. Everybody thought I would be a fine artist and have a fine art career. I did a lot of art guild programs and gifted programs and got scholarships, but by the time I hit college age, I realized I was an extrovert. The introverted, solitary life of an artist didn’t fit my personality; it fit my talent, but it didn’t fit me as a person. Between my sophomore and junior year of college, I was home for the summer and as a fluke, I enrolled in a cosmetology program. It was artistic, creative, hands-on and people-oriented. I picked up a pair of scissors, and that was it for me. I loved it.

“For the last 30 years, cosmetology has been my primary profession. I own a salon in Seattle. I’m a hair color specialist, and my clients have been my canvas for years. It’s had all the elements of who I am as a person. I really started getting back into painting right about 9/11. I just had this desire to paint with a craziness. I went into my art studio, and I did a series called the Freedom series. It was 10 large, abstract pieces motivated by the lyrics of the national anthem. The names of the pieces were *Dawn’s Early Light* and *Amber Waves* and *Rocket’s Red Glare*. Since I owned the salon, I hung the entire series in the salon. I had such a great response that I sold them all within two months. That was when I stepped it up. I really started painting with a vengeance about 10 years ago.

“To this day, I have the salon in Seattle. I consider myself bicoastal, even though I live in Richmond, Virginia, full time. When I lived in Seattle full time, I bought a second home and had an art studio in Sedona for about five years around 2004. I’ve always loved the Southwest. The wide-open spaces have always been an inspiration for me. So here’s my schedule now: I paint in my art studio in Richmond full time, eight hours a day for one month. On the fifth week, I fly back to Seattle and work in my salon for about a week to 10 days. Then I’m back to Richmond, working in my studio for a month. I’ve been doing that for over two years. I really love the two things. I like the balance between the two. I can’t lock myself in the studio without any interaction. It makes me crazy.

“The series I did after 9/11 was mostly acrylic on canvas. It was very textured, and it was the last series I did on canvas. Then I moved into encaustic painting, which is where you take panels and paint with beeswax infused with resin and pigments. You paint with a torch, and it really is fantastic. I did that medium for several years. Then I phased myself out of that and created this new thing with paint, sand, leaves and twigs layered between high-gloss varnish. That is the medium I’ve perfected over the years. It’s a sort of mixed-media, contemporary, high-gloss resin medium. I don’t paint on anything other than wood or Masonite anymore because I need that sturdy support. The pieces are heavy because of all the layers.

“I had been so passionate about encaustic painting, but I literally woke up one morning, came down to my art studio and decided I was finished with it. I tore my studio completely apart, took everything out, and started rifling through my garage. I found boat varnish, leaves, twigs, paper, cardboard ... I was looking for a new inspiration inside of myself, and that’s where it started. It’s definitely evolved since then, but the



pieces still have those elements. This was in 2004 – it's been awhile.

"I tend to gravitate toward paintings that have an illusion of a subject matter but inspires the person who's viewing it to finish [the painting]. One of my inspirations is geology – rock formations in particular. My paintings aren't literal, but they might be close-ups of rocks and boulders and the river rocks and the colors and the movement. I love that because it lends itself to large, abstract pieces with movement and a little bit of subject matter. I have done some things where people can kind of see the subject matter, and they feel victorious. There's that organic connection with the abstract feel, which is what I love. Since I've moved to Virginia, the landscape is completely different [from Seattle]. I pass by pastures with horses and white fences on my way to the grocery store around the corner. I drove by these three horses that were always by the road, staring out. I noticed there was a colt, so I had to take pictures. Now I'm doing these whimsical pieces with horses. They are very whimsical; they are not literal.

"My work is definitely affected by traveling back and forth from Richmond to Seattle. The light is very different in both places. I do tend to be drawn toward vibrant colors, which is not a Northwest thing. Up there, things are very monochromatic. When I line up my pieces, they go together. There are some monochromatic pieces, but I like the browns and siennas and golds. They always just end up in my pieces. It's the way I see things more than anything.

"For the most part, I'm inspired by what I'm feeling about a given subject. I've become emotionally driven in my inspiration more than literally inspired. For example, I just finished a series called *Inner Triumph*. I've always been inspired by the people who have the courage

in the middle, and I want that creative process to be able to take me in a different direction. That's one of the things I love so much about my art now. In my salon career, I have limitations because I have clients who have an idea or vision. I love the fact that I don't have to do that with my paintings. I like being able to turn directions and let the painting develop. It's sort of about letting go of control, though I'm getting proficient. My ideas are 80 percent of that glimmer from the very beginning when I'm done.

"I've had people from all over the world buy my art. I think they are drawn to the color and movement. The way I see abstract art sometimes is that because it's not painting a particular thing in depth, it's an emotional response you have toward it. Color is very, very important. Sometimes the art will create an instantaneous emotion when you pass by it. That's what abstract art tends to do. I've been told that color is my best asset.

"The stories behind my paintings aren't really that complicated. If I'm at an artist's reception, I don't tell [collectors] what I'm doing. I ask, 'What do you like about my art?' They will start to tell me, and all of a sudden they are engaged with the piece. Abstract pieces are like that. I have actually put a few paintings to rest because people would see something creepy that I didn't see [laughs]. I did a watery one, and people kept seeing snakes in the water. I love to hear what people see in any venue in life.

"I'm not a huge art collector, but I love to view art. I remember hearing an interview with Neil Diamond. He was asked what kind of music he listens to when he's writing songs. He said he doesn't listen to music when he's writing because he doesn't want to subconscious-

“A day without **MAKING** something
is a day **WASTED** in my life.”

to dig deep and find the best of who they are, whether it be gearing up to run a marathon or losing weight or facing an emotional obstacle. Sometimes I call the same series 'finding my inner skinny' because it's about finding the things in your life that no longer serve you. I'm a people person – that's what I love the most. I love to see people who face life with an optimistic attitude that wins over adversity.

"The first gallery I got into was Renee Taylor Gallery in Sedona. I had been painting for four years, and I brought in some work. I had brought in some encaustic pieces around 2003. Renee liked them, but they were very Seattle. When I started this new technique, I worked on it for about a year, so I had a strong body of work at that time. I loaded up my car with about 15 pieces of my work, drove to Sedona and showed Renee. She took them all, and I've been in her galleries ever since. That was 2005. I'm in five galleries across the country now.

"I work on multiple paintings at a time. I think it's important to put things aside for a while and then come back and look at it clearer and fresher. I spend a minimum of six to eight hours every day – sometimes more – painting. I really am completely committed. Most of my creativity begins between my two ears. Texture inspires me, so I like to start with a textured surface – even if the piece does wind up with a high gloss – because the paint does something different with textures. They almost look a little bit three-dimensional. I'll varnish in between layers so it almost looks like there's a piece of glass between the layers. I'm sort of like a horse that's running the Kentucky Derby. I get an idea, and it runs through my head quickly. I just go. I don't think too long about where I'm going because I might change paths

ly influence his work. I totally understood what he was saying. I tend to try to isolate myself so my style is authentically mine. It's not that I don't love others' art, but I don't study and inspect it.

"I recently found this vintage, turn-of-the-century sheet music from Chopin. That's one of the paper elements of a new collection I'm working on. The base of my painting will be layers of Chopin's sheet music. My idea is that these paintings will have a water or mountain innuendo, but you will see the music through it. My idea is that the music is singing the song of the painting. It's kind of my new thing. I'm excited – I almost hate to talk about it because I don't know how [the paintings] are going to turn out or where they will end up. But that's inspiring to me. It will be a series – I like to do things in a series of at least 10. Sometimes, if I don't know what I'm going to do, I'll find an inspirational saying that has a victorious, optimistic attitude, and I will write it in big black ink across the base of the canvas. Then I will paint over it. Intuitively, I know it's under there, and I feel like it's going to come out somehow.

"As I've become a more seasoned artist, my paintings aren't changing drastically quickly. I've learned the best of what I've done, [then I] take those pieces and add new inspiration. Through the years, I've kept pieces of everything I've ever done. I have paintings from when I was a kid and got a scholarship in high school for this national art guild. Over a long period of time, I can see why I did what I did. When you're in the best place you can be, it brings out the best of who you are. I was definitely born to be a creative person. A day without making something is a day wasted in my life." •

Inner Triumph

