



“Although my themes and subjects shift — this year the sound of surf and the hum of bees echo in my work — the interplay of the natural and the abstract, classical and modern remain a constant dynamic in my painting.” Georgia Nassikas, artist’s statement.

Currently on display in the Ramp Gallery at the McLean Project for the arts are the encaustic paintings of Georgia Nassikas. A native of McLean and a beekeeper, she uses her own beeswax in her landscapes to create depth and atmosphere. The skies appear to be swirling with wind, perhaps a prognostic omen to a gathering storm. The waters afar appear calm, but on closer inspection seem alive with energy. The nexus of nature’s elements are embedded in the artist’s works.

Nassikas lives on a Civil War era three-acre farm overlooking the Potomac. Each day, the views from her studio provide her inspiration to create. She wrote, “Across the Potomac from Washington, my studio overlooks rolling gardens and woods. From the windows I can see the blue and yellow beehives that form an elemental part of my artistic process. The hives, as images on the canvas, and the beeswax, as a medium for encaustic painting, figure in my recent works.” Nassikas shared insight into her process while giving McLean Patch a tour of her studio and beehives in McLean.

McLean Patch: Can you describe your encaustic process?

Georgia Nassikas: [The] technique of encaustic is an ancient art form from Greece and Fayoum in Egypt ... Fayoum portraits were on exhibit in the Met (in New York City) ... [There were] beautiful masks and [encaustic painting is] an ancient medium combining three things: beeswax, pigment and the resin from fir trees called demar. [Demar] comes in a crystal. You grind it with a mortar and pestle. It’s the binding that keeps it on the surface.

Now you can buy bricks with pigment, demar and wax. It’s safer because pigments are toxic.

MP: What surface do you use?

GN: It won’t work on canvases. [You] need a rigid surface like a wood panel or board. Recently I’ve been working on paper.

MP: How did you learn the encaustic process?

GN: I learned from watching You Tube and attending workshops at the Torpedo Factory and from the woman who sold me the bricks.

MP: How long have you been an artist?

GN: [I’ve been] serious about art my whole life. I’m an interior designer by training. ... I was a painter in oils and acrylics.

MP: What inspired you to do encaustics?

GN: When I saw the wax that I’ve been getting from the bees at home...and the natural world is powerful – landscapes are filled with energy ...I love being outdoors and gardening...The studio smells good. There’s a yin and yang between the hot and cold, the liquid and solid, the sheer volume or scale and then the wonderful three elements that make up the painting.

MP: Who were your greatest influences?

GN: Jasper Johns. I saw one of his flag paintings and it was encaustic. Fayoum images, an encaustic image in a Pompeii exhibit, my family, my

mother’s family is full of artists. My great-grandfather George de Forest Brush* had a show at the National Gallery a couple of years ago.

MP: I know your father’s side of the family is filled with politicians, how do they feel about your career?**

GN: My whole family is supportive, both sides. They were influences on my work as well.

MP: Do you have any upcoming shows?

GN: The (e)merge art fair in D.C. [end of September], Gallery D.C. 555 from Thanksgiving until year-end in a show called 10 by 2, a solo exhibit at the Art League next March, Art Expo NYC on Pier 94 in the last week in March.

*George de Forest Brush (1855-1941) was an American painter and an early designer of camouflage. In 2008, the National Gallery showed an exhibition of his Native American paintings.

**Nassikas was born to a prominent Rhode Island family. John Chafee, her father, was a senator and governor; her brother Lincoln is a former senator and now governor to the family’s home state.

What: Encaustic Paintings Georgia Nassikas on display at MPA until Nov. 5. Additional Information: www.mpaart.org