

Jane Martin Exhibits at Hotchkiss

Published: Tuesday, December 31, 2013

By Kathryn Boughton

Jane Martin is a “multi-person”—multi-lingual, multi-talented, multi-disciplinary in her artistic endeavors and multi-media in their application. This month, the Tremaine Gallery at Hotchkiss School, 11 Interlaken Road in Lakeville, CT is showing her work in an exhibition aptly named, “Jane Martin: Beyond Boundaries,” which will be on view through Jan. 26th, 2014.

Ms. Martin’s work explores the power of the natural landscape and the human body. The Tremaine exhibition includes paintings, video stills and a video installation.

Working in five distinct mediums—painting, photography, film, video stills and video installation—has provided her with a wide latitude for her methodologies. But as a young person, she did not initially seem destined for a life in the arts.

“Both my parents were artistic,” she explained. “My father studied at Pratt and worked briefly in advertising and my 18 year-old nephew is an incredible artist—so there is artistic talent in the family—but there was no real example in my family, no exposure to any [working] artists.”

She was, instead, an honors student who was very interested in language, literature and art. “I wasn’t sure what direction I was going,” she recalled this week in a telephone interview.

Before graduating summa cum laude from the State University of New York at Oneonta with a B. A. in studio art, she was chosen to participate in a study abroad program in Tours, France, under the direction of Erik Koch, former student of and assistant to

abstract expressionist Hans Hofmann. Immersion in this intensive master-student environment and life in another culture with proximity to European art collections became a watershed in her life, she says on her website. She remained in France for six years, living in the south of France, Lyon, Strasbourg as well as in Copenhagen while painting and traveling to European museums.

“I was initially a painter,” she said, “but during that time I was exposed to European cinema, which I found so compelling. My early exposure had been to Hollywood blockbusters, and I could never imagine myself making a film like in that genre. But after five or six years painting in France—and in Copenhagen for a short time—I went back to New York and studied film at New York University. I landed my first job as assistant editor for Al Pacino and worked with a lot of fabulous people in New York.”

She was hired by Gregory Colbert (“Ashes and Snow”) to shoot and edit his first film. This led her back to Paris for another eight years in the film and television industry, which culminated in her directing and producing the documentary film, “Silent Sentries,” filmed in New York, edited in Paris and broadcast on PBS.

“I had intended to go back to New York,” she said of her second European sojourn, “but Paris was simply a wonderful place to live. I worked for 10 or 12 years in film and television, making my own documentaries and attending the international festivals. But in the 1990’s things became challenging in France and I decided to come back to New York. The kinds of films I wanted to make were not mainstream and funding was difficult.”

She had largely given up painting while working in the film industry, but upon her return to the United States, she established an art studio on the lower East Side and returned to painting as a means of creative expression. With the advent of digital video, in an experiment that involved videotaping a model for a painting she was working on, she discovered the poetry of the “moment between moments” of a split-second of video—and went on to develop an innovative approach to the medium of video stills, according to her website.

She isolates distinct images from the extensive video footage she has taken, often focusing on ocean waves, or the encounter between the female form in a natural environment obscured by fog or mist. The images highlight the undeniable grandeur of nature and our capacity to find stillness within it. “I think I’m working on a counterpoint to the frantic pace of everything,” Ms. Martin has said. “In my art, I get to slow it down.”

Part of slowing it down was a move out of the New York City to East Hampton, N.Y., where she is surrounded by 26 acres of sea and woodland and finds ample raw material to feed her artistic explorations in painting, video and video stills.

“In 2003, I got tired of city life,” she explained, “and moved to East Hampton where I found an incredible home and studio on the former property of Ward Bennett [a designer, architect and sculptor who died that same year]. It is a beautiful place to be, right on a salt marsh. Being surrounded by this natural context it has entered my work. I work a lot with water—primarily the ocean.

“I work in a lot of mediums and I consider myself to be a seeker, a wanderer,” she continued. “I am investigating nature in all its forms—water, fog, tornadoes and the female body. When I start to work on a notion, a direction I want to go in, I work very organically and things come out of the process. When something is forming, it seems to speak in a particular medium—it might be a photograph, a painting, a video still.”

She said her career “really took off with the video stills.” The process of taking a split-second of video and transforming it into a work of art is painstaking, she explained. “It takes about two weeks to perfect a video still for printing. You have to take out the

video artifacts and, when you have a print it is then a 32-step process to mount it and coat it with resin. The thought first came to me in New York City in the late 1990s and I was able to do some that were quite small with resin from a hardware store. It took me about four years to develop a method to create larger works.”

She said the print is first mounted on an archival board and then glued to a wood panel. The surface of the print is coated 15 times to protect it before the resin is finally applied, “a very extensive process,” in her words.

Recently she has returned to painting and is spending “more time getting my hands dirty,” she said. “I still work abstractly and I enjoy that.”

Each methodology that she employs enriches the other. “It’s just my nature,” she said. “I like to surprise myself. I’ll do several pieces in a series and then I want to investigate something else. I do have themes however: the female body, tornado and water imagery. My work is quite a mix of things, but people have always said there’s a sense it comes from the same artist.”

She has never seen a tornado, but that has not prevented her from exploring them in her art. “For me, they are simply vortexes of energy that I try to capture in a series I call ‘Force Majeure,’” she said. “Most of my works refer to the primal power of nature, which has become undeniable in our time. The tornadoes just came through me. I am not a conceptual artist at all; I try to leave my mind at the door and channel different energies. I am basically interested in drawing the viewers in and letting them tell their own stories out of what they are seeing.”

Jane Martin has exhibited her work in museums and galleries in New York City, Miami, Santa Fe, Dallas, Europe and the east end of Long Island, N.Y., including solo exhibitions at Guild Hall Museum and Islip Art Museum. Learn more at www.janemartinart.com.

The Tremaine Gallery is located in the main building of Hotchkiss School. For more information about this exhibition or other arts events, phone 860-435-4423 or visit www.hotchkiss.org/arts. Gallery hours are Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 4 p.m.