

**BECKY BLACK
JULIA FOSSON
BEN HECHT
AHAVANI MULLEN**



**JENNIFER PRETZEUS
TECHNIQUE: SHARI REPLOGLE
JAMES EDWARD SCHERBARTH
ALICIA TORMEY**



JENNIFER PRETZEUS

Desert Muse



Walking Home, (diptych), encaustic, dry earth pigments, ash, azurite, charcoal, horsehair, oil paint, on cradled board, 18 x 48 inches, 2016

Image Details, previous page:

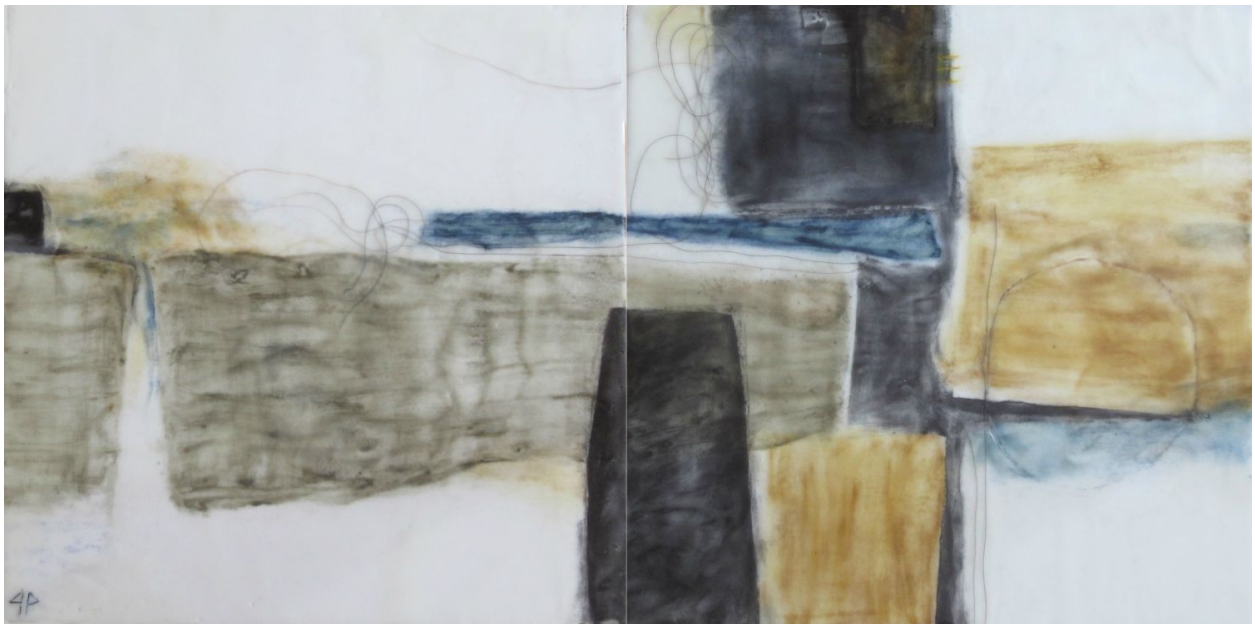
Cerrillos, encaustic, dry natural pigments, ground turquoise, charcoal, oil paint, horsehair, on board, 12 x 12 inches, 2015

“With time you learn to see what is absent: the spring in the winter, the mountain lion in the devoured stag, the flows of water that carved the dry land, the bygone feet that walked the path into being, the living in the dead, the movement in the stones. . . If you come here seeking something particular you may find only it. Or find nothing. But if you come seeking the desert it will be given to you in time. . . It will be given to you as story and music”.

— From *Desert Music* by Rebecca Solnit

It finally hit me when I came to the high desert of New Mexico. Inspiration. I was instantly moved by the elegant simplicity of overlapping planes, the rhythm of textures, the graceful line of the horizon and the overall openness that allowed me to fully breathe. I love the history of the place and how it holds visible memories spanning centuries—the revelations contained in layers of geology, a dry river bed etched in the landscape, an adobe structure returning to the earth, perhaps only making its presence known by a depression where a kiva once existed.

I'd been taking painting courses at an art center in Chicago every weekend and often struggled to come up with subject matter. After living in Chicago for 15 years, my husband and I decided it was time for a major change and moved to Albuquerque. Just weeks before moving, I took my first class in encaustics at the same art center. I'd seen a few encaustic pieces at the international art exposition *ART Chicago* and was fascinated and intrigued by the depth, translucence and luminosity of the medium. Even though I was busy with packing and planning a cross-country journey, I figured I'd better fit this class in, since I wouldn't have an opportunity like this in New Mexico. I couldn't have been more wrong about that.



Shift, encaustic and dry natural pigments, azurite, charcoal, horsehair, on cradled wood panel, 16 x 32 inches, 2015

Soon after arriving, I took a couple of weekend workshops with Santa Fe encaustic artist Ellen Koment. She is a great teacher who introduced many techniques and encouraged experimentation; I really began getting a strong sense of all of the possibilities with this medium. Then I learned about the Encaustic Art Institute (then in Cerrillos, now in Santa Fe) and became a member. I was pleasantly surprised to find that there were so many other encaustic artists not only in the state, but in the country. Around the same time, I was working diligently to incorporate nature into my life (something I was beginning to long for in Chicago)—hiking regularly and exploring New Mexico. Knowing a little about how the old masters created paint, I began to wonder if I could somehow incorporate all of the spectacular colors I was seeing in the landscape into my work. While hiking in the badlands near Cuba, NM, I filled about a dozen zip lock baggies with various colors of dirt and clay. I reached a whole new level of excitement and motivation once I discovered that I could utilize the actual land that was inspiring me in my work.

The Process

I start with clumps of dirt or clay that I've gathered, place them in a bag, and break them up with a mallet. Next, I grind the dirt with a mortar and pestle and then sift that through a fine sieve purchased at a pottery supply store. As a base, I usually start with 2-3 layers of encaustic medium on a board before using a brush (or sometimes my fingers) to sweep the dry pigment onto the wax and then use a torch to fuse it into the wax. It takes numerous layers — anywhere between 2-5 — to build up a rich color. Often I layer different colors to add more depth and/or interest.



Mica Mine, encaustic, dry natural pigments, mica, horsehair, on board, 7 x 10 inches, 2014

In addition to dirt and clay, I also grind up rocks and minerals I find. I've been a rock collector since elementary school, so the search is especially fun! A blueish-colored shale that I found near Battleship Rock in the Jemez Mountains becomes a green-grey when added to the wax. Mica, gathered from Ojo Caliente, NM, doesn't grind up finely, but I can sprinkle the glitter-sized pieces into warm wax or use larger pieces of it. I also incorporate ash and charcoal from fires I've built. Because the ash is so fine, it usually takes 5-10 layers to achieve the desired results.

Gathering the materials myself or receiving them as gifts, of course, gives the process and the work additional meaning for me. Horseback riding is a favorite activity of mine, and I've discovered that horsethair creates a beautiful, delicate line when added to the wax. The mica mine at Ojo Caliente is one of the most magical places I've visited in New Mexico, and I love that that unique mineral has also found a place in my work. A dear friend recently gave me a small box of azurite pebbles that he received as a gift during a Native American ceremony by a woman who uses stones for healing and balancing. Ground and sifted, the azurite turns a deep, rich blue once embedded in wax. Another friend recently gave me some strands of horsethair from the tail of her beloved, departed horse, Trooper. In many ways, some of the pieces become reliquaries, of a secular sort.

All of these materials, especially with the dirt and clay, then become a part of the work through the same processes that have shaped our earth—through the layering of sediment, scraping, carving and heating. Even as I am in my studio (a.k.a. my garage . . . with the door open for ventilation), I am at the mercy of the forces of nature. In the summer it is often too hot, in the spring too windy, and in the winter often just not possible to be working. But battling the elements, while at times frustrating, also takes me to a deeper level when creating my work.

Crossing Paths

I was honored to have recently been selected by the Open Space Visitor Center Gallery in Albuquerque for an exhibit that explored my personal relationship with the land, specifically, my favorite hiking trail in Albuquerque — the Pino Trail (#140) in the Elena Gallegos Open Space. Entitled *Crossing Paths*, the show examined the idea that when we separate ourselves from nature, we lose the very connection that sustains us. (Show dates were January 14th - March 19th, 2017.) Half of the show consisted of 7 encaustic pieces depicting large boulders along the trail, which, to me, are like pieces of art in an outdoor sculpture garden. Because I hike there so regularly, the boulders have become like friends. (Fellow hikers have probably wondered who the crazy woman is talking to and stroking the rocks.) The other 8 pieces in the show incorporated pieces of scrap metal. I was inspired by the interesting rust patterns on the metal and found the juxtaposition of the cold hard steel against the soft, translucent, organic wax intriguing. These pieces represent the interrelatedness and necessary exchange between nature and man. I utilized other natural elements in some of these pieces, such as pollen and flower stamens. The show was a tribute to this trail and, on a larger scale, to this landscape that has inspired me.



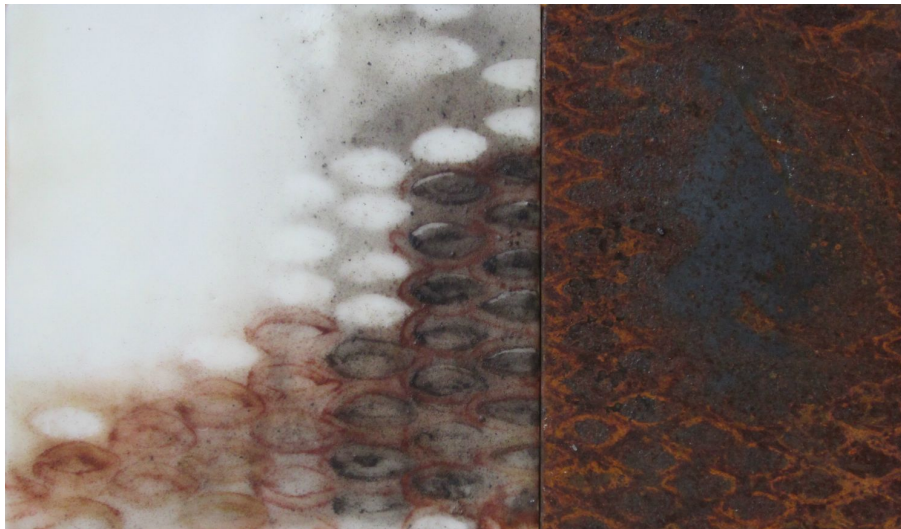
Balance Rock, encaustic, dry natural pigments, ash, horsehair, oil paint, on cradled wood panel, 16 x 16 inches, 2016



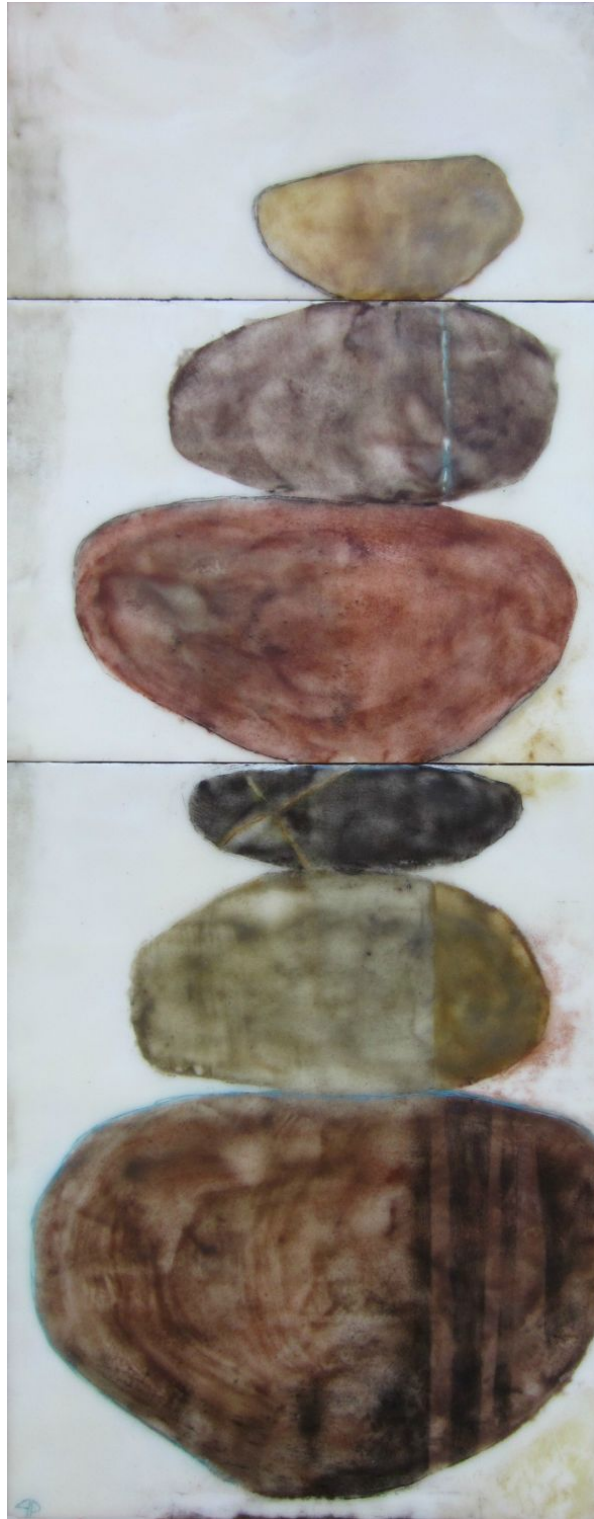
Healing Rock, encaustic, dry natural pigments, ash, azurite, charcoal, horsehair, oil paint, on cradled wood panel, 16 x 16 inches, 2016



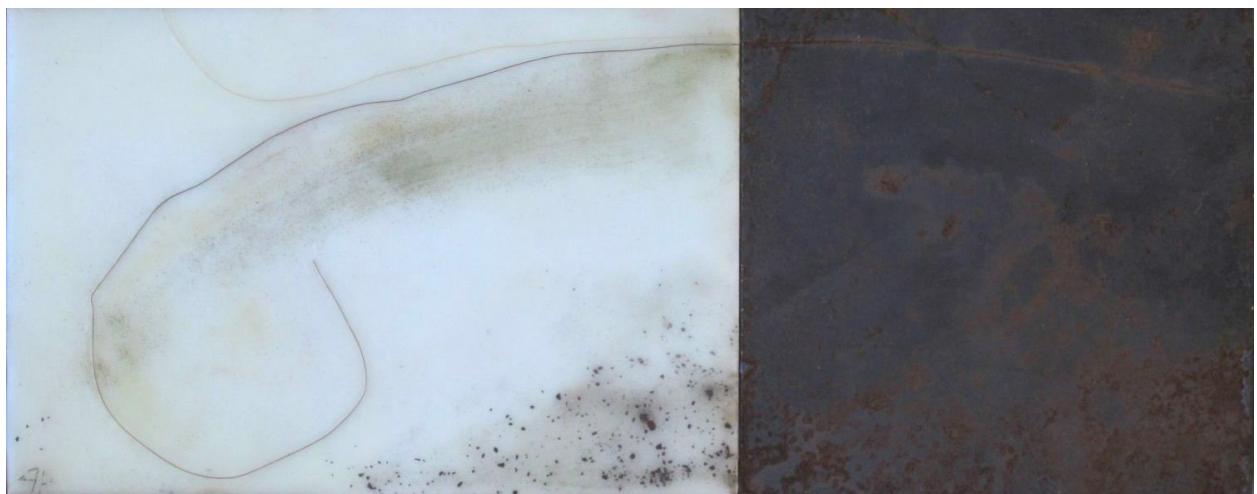
Family Stones, encaustic, dry natural pigments, ash, charcoal, horsehair, oil paint, on cradled wood panel, 16 x 16 inches, 2016



Hive, steel, encaustic, dry natural pigments, on board, 6 x 10.25 inches, 2016



Cairn, encaustic, dry natural pigments, charcoal, oil paint, on board, 11 x 28 inches, 2015



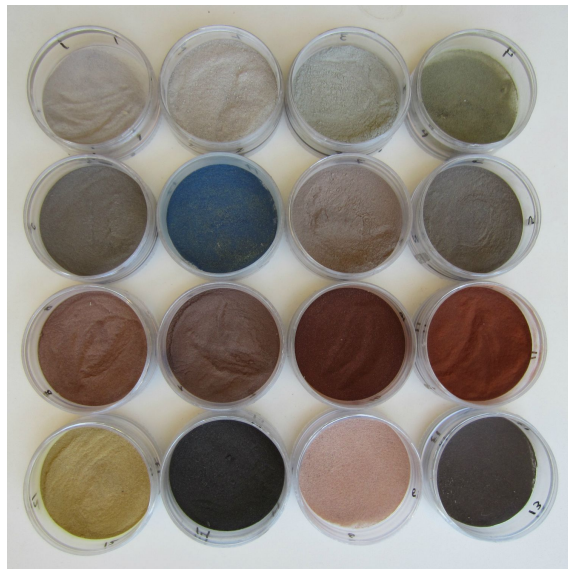
Fronde, steel, encaustic, dry natural pigments, rust, ash, horsehair, on board, 4.75 x 11.5 inches, 2016

"The austerity of the desert is also uncountable wealth, a hoard to be sifted through...the constant shift from overwhelming vastness to the detail at your feet, the harsh beauty of the terrain unrolling in the distance, the eons recorded in the stones, an endless, ongoing, unfinished list, a wealth so uncountable it takes the world to hold it."

— From *Desert Music* by Rebecca Solnit



Storm, encaustic, dry natural pigments, rust, mica, on board, 7.75 x 11 inches, 2016



Artist-made dry natural earth pigments

BIO



Jennifer Pretzeus is a New Mexico based visual artist currently focusing in encaustics. She studied graphic design and advertising at Kent State University in Ohio. Following graduation, Pretzeus continued her education at the School of Visual Arts in New York City and at the Evanston Art Center in Chicago, where she took her first class in encaustic painting about 10 years ago. The direction of her art shifted after moving to New Mexico in 2006, as she and her art were deeply affected by the land and the environment. In addition to working in the medium of encaustic, Pretzeus also creates jewelry containing found natural objects and constructs welded steel sculptures utilizing scrap metal. Her work is exhibited at the Museum of Encaustic Art in Santa Fe. In October 2014, her piece "Acoma" was awarded Best of Show in the National Juried Encaustic/Wax Exhibit at the Encaustic Art Institute, in Santa Fe.

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