

Corinne Lalin, Easton Irregular Art Profile, June 2013

A tilted sign painted "Hippie Entrance" points the way to Corinne Lalin's studio in Upper Black Eddy. I walk down a path lined with tall ferns and cross two bluestone slabs that cover an aquifer and double as the studio's back steps.

Inside, after we browsed through some paintings, she turned on the electric griddle that warms tins of encaustic paint. The medium is reusable since wax melts again and again, and mixing her own encaustic paint is cheaper than buying it readymade. When Corinne needs a fresh color, she melts chunks of pleasant-smelling beeswax, and then adds a sprinkle of pure, dry pigment and a smattering of Damar varnish; if she wants a thicker medium she melts in impasto or modeling paste. (The technique itself is old and durable; even today, Egyptian funeral portraits made from the first century B.C through A.D. third century look freshly painted.) She applies the encaustic to a prepared surface with metal palette knives and bristle brushes and after heating a knife on her griddle for a moment, she uses it to reactivate and manipulate the encaustic paints that were already laid down. Razoring off a dried top layer to expose lower layers of color, Lalin smiles. "I really have no clue what will happen," then starts fiddling around and building up the surface again. "I also use heat as an eraser," she says, and with the flick of a switch of a hair dryer, all the layered beauty and bright colors melt into a puddle, proving just how vulnerable this supremely plastic material can be.

Lalin received her B.F.A. in 1986 and M.F.A. in 1989 from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. For the past two years, she and her husband the painter John Schmidtberger have run Schmidtberger Fine Art Gallery in Frenchtown, New Jersey. Currently, she teaches at Lehigh Carbon Community College and over the years has taught: Painting, Drawing, Two-Dimensional Design, Art History, Ceramics, Bookmaking, Weaving and Woman Studies (Women and Art). Also, she has taught at the Roberto Clemente Charter School in Allentown, Moravian College in Bethlehem, and Philadelphia University in Philadelphia. She has shown at the River Arts Gallery II in Damariscotta, ME, and at Prallsville Mills Gallery in Stockton, NJ. She was included in the 2007 *Tri-County Secondary Arts Educators Invitational* at Lafayette College.

Along with encaustic painting, Lalin also makes Joseph Cornell-esque boxes filled with thrift store finds and tiny, precious

objects. She relishes organizing the numerous pieces and packing them into small spaces—she connects realism and traditional folk art through sculpture—and I respond to this work as a unifying symbol, one that makes order of disparate activities: travel, family experiences, art exhibitions and teaching.

Even as a student, Lalin's figure, still life and landscape paintings diverged into two distinct styles. One was traditional, well-organized and packed with information like her assemblages today; and the other, like her current encaustic work, was abstract and emotional, resembling Edvard Munch's paintings and inspired by evening walks in Bucks County. Corinne's encaustic paintings record nature's magnetism as floating and swirling bits of color. Twilight, the moment when light yields to darkness, is especially well served by the encaustic medium since it dries quickly and allows her to keep areas of prismatic, bright daylight separate from patches of deep, velvety darkness. In a matter of minutes she can build up a thickly mottled and dappled surface without intermingling color. Oil paint allows her to define contours, highlights and shadows; encaustic, as much as it is tactile and sensual, is also thick and difficult to control, forcing her to stay abstract. Taking a stab at rendering form, her impressionistic tree-and-landscape references read as though they have no actual edges: objects or horizon lines drift in and out of looking "real" even as they feel supernaturally solid. Working with layers of wax, Lalin sandwiches distinct, saturated colors together, mimicking the mixed feelings and impulses I feel in moody moments. The vibrant, hermetic work stops time, placing me firmly on the outside looking in at beauty, making me idealize her kaleidoscopic world and long to stay there. The knowledge that I cannot stay there heightens my appreciation for time and beauty passing in our mundane one.