

## Silence Speaks

### THREE CREATIONS BY ONE ARTIST AT ANTON GALLERY OPEN INTO A PERSONAL WORLD.

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By Crystal Barnes



Real Substance: Francie Hester built the works for *Vestige* with materials like acrylics, wax, aluminum, and raw pigment.

In an old body shop in Kensington, Maryland, artist Francie Hester receives large customized pieces of aluminum. She then lays them all out on the floor as if they are one piece and applies a metal primer. Then she chooses one of the panels and builds up the surface with acrylics. Once the panel is heavy with paint and texture she attacks it with steel wool, hammers and drills. She scrapes and sands and drills and sands. She applies wax mixed with raw pigment in a thin layer; it gets caught in the drilled cavities, adding depth to the stripped-down surface. All that ultimately remains is a fossil of her work, a fossil that now hangs at the Anton Gallery on Hawthorne Street in Monterey.

The aluminum panels have been created in two series, *Strata* and *Vestige*, both produced after 9/11. After the planes crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Hester says, she couldn't go back to her studio and paint the same things. Life was different and her work had to reflect that. There's no missing the connection to 9/11 in her work. For one, aluminum is the same material used to construct airplanes. Perhaps it was chosen on a subconscious level, perhaps it's just coincidence. Hester says it's just easy to work with.

What isn't coincidence is the constructing and deconstructing of each piece. In *Strata*, the focus was on stripping down the most beautiful sections. In doing so Hester asks: If we strip away beauty, do we still sense that it's there?

At Anton, one piece from *Strata* hangs next to a transitional piece, which leads into the second series. *Vestige* takes *Strata* one step further by building the fossil images back up and emphasizing the traces left behind by what has vanished.

Both of these series are fueled by the natural evolution of life and incorporate the idea that everything changes and no one can know what's going to happen.

To this end, and in addition to *Strata* and *Vestige*, Hester presents an installation entitled *Articulation*. It is a tribute to her late friend and journalist of 30 years, Diane Granat Yalowitz. Yalowitz, who died from brain cancer, an illness that left her unable to speak or write, was the senior editor and writer at *Washingtonian* magazine. Throughout 2005, under the direction of Hester, people who knew Yalowitz, and some who didn't, gathered to wrap over 20,000 paper clips with cuttings of her articles. Those clips were then linked into chains and hung.

Hester, who had seen this technique used by farmers in China to keep out bugs, carried wrapped paper clips around in her purse for quite some time before drawing on them for inspiration.

During the process of creating the paper-clip chains, random words appeared, some eerie (as if Yalowitz was speaking, she says) and some funny. The people wrapping the clips began to share stories and a community formed.

Lisa Hill, one of Hester's colleagues, took the random words that appeared and assembled them into a digital program that spins letters to form words in a manner that resembles code breaking. This program is projected up on the wall behind the hanging paper clips.

Once hung, the paper clip links created a sound similar to rain when shifted by a breeze or by the touch. This sound inspired Luis Garay to compose a *nigun*, which literally means "wordless song," using African and Asian instruments. In this context, the instrumental song that uses cymbals, bamboo chimes and gongs, and incorporates the sound from the wrapped paper clips, acts as a conduit for wordless communication.

Yalowitz's articles are also presented in a bound book put together by artist Cory Adcock-Camp, and attendees can wrap paper clips of their own.

Together, the acrylics and wax on aluminum panels and the installation all communicate places of silence. *Strata* and *Vestige* rose out of the ashes and silence of 9/11. The process speaks volumes about the layers of life and how we can feel out of control of our fates—in a moment, everything can change. Meanwhile, *Articulation* figuratively and literally liberates Yalowitz's words. In the process, stories are shared, healing takes place and people come together to form a community of sorts—a community that transcends words.

**STRATA, VESTIGE and ARTICULATION are spotlighted at a special reception 5-8pm Thursday at Anton Gallery, 701 Hawthorne St., Monterey. The exhibit runs through May 28. Admission is free. 373-4429.**