Wax Foundations
Encaustic in the Southeast
September 9–October 28, 2012
Kristen Gallagher
Student Curator

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Kristen Gallagher came to me with the concept for this exhibition two years ago, near the end of her sophomore year at Meredith. That previous summer, Kristen had done an independent study about the history and technical aspects of encaustic with Dr. James Boyles. She wanted to do an exhibition of contemporary work in the medium to show its relevance in today’s art world. Specifically, she was interested in the textural qualities of encaustic, and wanted to seek out artists whose work examined that theme. She had already created a contract major in museum studies and had the support of art history faculty Dr. Beth Mulvaney and Dr. Boyles. I was impressed by her enthusiasm, and perhaps more important to the process of planning and installing an exhibition, her organizational skills, initiative and confidence. She did not disappoint. I am pleased the Frankie G. Weems Art Gallery is presenting Wax Foundations on a variety of levels: Kristen is establishing important professional credibility in exhibition development: creating a master plan, seeking out and coordinating artists, managing exhibition logistics and installation, developing supplementary programs and producing a catalogue. The show is a stimulus to Meredith College art students as it exposes them to new ideas and techniques. No college gallery is an island, and Kristen has assembled a series of programs that reach out to other disciplines across campus to provide broader perspectives and context to the artwork. The exhibition demonstrates Kristen’s talent, vision, commitment, follow-through, and desire to learn and grow through this experience. It was a pleasure to work with her, and to learn from her, as well.

Anne Roth, Gallery Director

Foreward

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For a medium over two thousand years old, encaustic has a strikingly contemporary feel to it. With roots in ancient Greece and a past that leads through valleys in Egypt, cold monasteries in Russia, salons and conversations in 18th century England and France, in old Boston churches, encaustic has experienced a renaissance. This medium, marked by the use of melted wax mixed with pigments and applied hot to substrates, is one with a varied and colorful history. Though never truly dormant, as some have suggested, encaustic has slipped in and out of popular taste. Here in America, the medium’s story winds throughout schools of thought and various artists’ studios—including Rembrandt Peale, John La Farge, Karl Zerbe, Arthur Dove, and most notably Jasper Johns. Today, encaustic artists are striking new ground, building on the foundations laid by artists before them.

Wax Foundations: Encaustic in the Southeast documents the development of the medium in the spirit of its history. As the first encaustic exhibition at Meredith College, and the first in the region, Wax Foundations contributes to the foundation already laid: the exhibition creates an opportunity to question the ballooning popularity of the medium while examining the expertise and vision it takes to create stunning works of wax and pigment. Wax Foundations explores the relationships made between wax and pigments, layers and substrates. It seeks to foster discussions of the medium itself, the nature of originality, texture, and depth. Forty-one works by eleven artists from North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina present their distinctive methods and visions. Through their work, the artists have pushed encaustic to new heights. Work in the exhibition ranges from tactile and literally impastoed to sheer and smooth. The work quietly references the heritage of wax painting while echoing each artist’s own words; each piece speaks individually, while the exhibition as a whole makes its own statement.

As a student, an artist, and a curator, I have approached the coordination of Wax Foundations with curiosity and wonder. Perhaps what drew me to wax over eight years ago was its virtuoso quality of transformation. I found I could express layers upon layers of intention and meaning, pushing the translucent, flowing medium under papers and over insect wings and through textiles. I believe the artists in this exhibition must have felt a similar curiosity with wax when they first began melting and mixing. In the light of the thousands of artists who have explored this medium since it was first conceived, it appears that it is clear wax holds intense magnetism and possibility a vast range of possibilities for both the creator and the viewer.

My fascination with the history and artistic dimensions of the medium prompted the organization of Wax Foundations: Encaustic in the Southeast. Adjunct professor of art history Dr. Boyles, and Frankie G. Weems Gallery Director Ann Roth provided guidance and support in shaping and producing the exhibition, programs and catalogue. The entire process has fascinated us, and we have been given many an opportunity to learn, to experience, and to question, and above all, to enjoy art. I hope you will do the same as you turn these pages and meander through the gallery.
Humans have used beeswax for centuries for a variety of purposes—for cosmetics, polishers, medicines, candles, and seals. Some of the earliest audio recordings were done on beeswax cylinders, and early writing was done on beeswax tablets. For artists, it is has been a vehicle for resisting pigments, for resisting the plate-biting effects of acid, and for applying pigments.

We all know that bees make that slow-pouring, special-tasting, amber-colored sweet stuff. But, in fact, that is not all they make. A worker bee produces tiny wax flakes when she is only 12 days old. Inside every beehive is a remarkable architecture made of bee-produced wax. Worker bees must consume about 8 times as much nectar and pollen to make beeswax than it would take for them to make an equivalent amount of honey. It is estimated that bees must fly around 150,000 miles to get enough pollen and nectar to make a pound of beeswax.

Bees reward themselves, and us, with honey and wax, but they give us even more. Over millions of years, bees and other animals have fine-tuned a choreography with flowering plants, their flowers trading food in the form of nectar for the bees in exchange for a taxi-ride for their pollen to another plant. And it is well and good that they do, for this ancient relationship between bees and flowering plants is directly responsible for the pollination of 35% of the world’s crop production, increasing the output of 87 of the leading food crops worldwide1. Thus, the fate of a significant portion of our food is tied to the well-being of this diminutive animal.

Embedded within each encaustic painting is the work of humans and nature, the creative efforts of both bee and artist.

Bachenheimer wants her paintings to convey a rich visual and tactile connection to feelings evoked by the mystery and beauty of our passage through life. Evidence of the world beyond our limited understanding is something Bachenheimer strives to capture in her work. She experiences this world in places where things meet and merge such as the place where sky meets earth, in places where the past is visible in the present like an old wall or photograph, in the movement of light on the natural world and in what lies below the surface. In the 1970’s, Bachenheimer wove tapestries. Her weaving experience shows in her love of texture and horizontal and vertical lines. She began painting in 1998 using watercolor and acrylic paints. Working with encaustic since 2006, has allowed her to get closer to what she wants to express. She starts with watercolor washes and then collages thin paper with watercolor brushwork, layering with encaustic medium. She also uses opaque encaustic color, papers, oil sticks and found objects. Scraping and fusing allow her to reveal past layers and merge colors. In addition to encaustic, Bachenheimer works with oil paint over highly textured acrylic on canvas. In this process, she builds many layers using brushes and palette knives and working over many days.

Bachenheimer grew up in Seattle and Cleveland in a family of 6 with a museum director father. She graduated from Smith College and Bank Street College of Education and taught young children in public schools for over 30 years. Near the end of her teaching career, she began classes at the ArtsCenter in Carrboro and Penland School of Craft. She now paints full time in her studio at her home in Carrboro, NC. She lives with her husband, Steve, and they have 4 grown children.
Bregman Blass has always been interested in the relationship between inner narratives and the stories one develops to make sense of life. As an artist she currently works with encaustic and mixed media. Encaustic is a medium composed of pigment, beeswax & damar resin. Because of the translucency of this medium, whatever lies beneath the visible surface, the history of the painting is always available. In other mediums the progression of a piece is never visible once a final layer of paint is applied. Leonard Schlain beautifully describes Jasper Johns’ work with encaustic in Art & Physics as a “translucent archaeological tell allowing the viewer to squint through the usually opaque of an artwork’s present and discern the ghosts of its past.” Encaustic, as such, has become a perfect medium for me to continue exploring memory, stories, and history...the containers we develop to hold our lives.

Bregman Blass is both an artist and a family therapist finding that each has enriched the other. Her education is in psychology, sociology and theatre arts. Though very involved in the arts in Los Angeles of the 70’s & 80’s it wasn’t until the 90’s that she began to explore her own lost creative voice. In 2008 she and her special project collaborator Leah Sobsey were awarded a Durham Arts Council Emerging Artist Grant and an Orange County Artists Grant for public art projects. They currently have various commissions together under the Visual History Collaborative, combining stories, artifacts, Memorabilia and photography into mixed media installations and smaller visual pieces.
Mary Farmer

Painting, the very act of painting springs from her deepest core; Mary Farmer loves to paint. This is the best explanation she can provide for the work she does. Her brain is basically streaming video all the time. Truly, she does her best to keep up with her visual consciousness. I love to see a physical response to my work, especially your overwhelming desire to reach out and touch the work. It is her intention for you to have a sensory and a visual experience with this work. It is her pleasure to share this work with you. Please feel free to offer comments.

Mary Farmer’s every breath reflects that of an accomplished, seasoned artist; she chose the unique medium of encaustic painting to express herself artistically to the world. Her pieces explore a wide range of content, possibilities and personal history. Using one of the most innovative methods of painting, Farmer melts beeswax and colored pigments into liquid and then applies the hot mixture to a panel. Unique to other artists that employ this method, Farmer often uses watercolor in her process. Her work has been widely featured in the media both print and broadcast. Her work is also included in the collections of World Marriott Orlando, The Atlanta College of Art and other important private collections throughout the country.

She has participated in juried exhibitions in Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco, and elsewhere. Farmer obtained her Bachelor of Fine Arts from Georgia State University after beginning her degree program at the Atlanta College of Art. She has completed several encaustic workshops and certificate programs in New York and San Francisco. She is a founding member of International Encaustic Artists, an organization that brings encaustic painters together to share, connect and collaborate on projects. Mary Farmer lives and works in Asheville, North Carolina.
Reni Gower blends a fluid improvisational painting approach with a repetitively structured and analytical one to create complex images that counter visual skimming. Gower incorporates the circle as a repetitive decorative motif, as a metaphor for binary code, and as a cultural symbol of infinite continuity. Through intricate patterning, Gower combines these references to link the passive precision of technology with the active nuance of handicraft. Her intent to induce a contemplative state of mind creates a visual respite that mirrors, but also transcends our accelerated tech-saturated culture. While also addressing issues of beauty, her art becomes an intimate vehicle for reflection or reprieve. Encaustic is a versatile medium that is well suited to the additive and subtractive layering processes Gower employs.

Gower is a Professor in the Painting and Printmaking Department at Virginia Commonwealth University. In 2008, she was recognized by VCUArts with an Award of Excellence in Research, Teaching, and Service and by the Southeastern College Art Conference in 2007 with an Award of Excellence in Teaching. In addition to her teaching and painting practice, she curates award-winning traveling exhibitions. Her current project is Papercuts, began traveling in October 2011. Her art work has been showcased at international and national venues for over 30 years. She is the recipient of numerous grants and awards including a NEA / SECCA Southeastern Artist Fellowship and Virginia Commission for the Arts Project Grants. Her work is represented in various collections including the Library of Congress Print Collection; Pleasant Company / Mattel, Inc; the American Embassies in Lima, Peru and Osaka, Japan; Media General, Inc; and the Federal Reserve Bank. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from Syracuse University, a Master of Arts degree from University of Minnesota-Duluth, and a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
In her most recent paintings, Lew Graham has been using the grid as her formal base. Within that Graham has produced some color block paintings where one basic color is varied from block to block by layers of glazes. These subtle variations produce motion within the piece and they also create an emotional climate. The color lock pieces use an active compositional component which implies both confrontation and interrelationship. The question that she has been working with is, how much she can express within this limited compositional form. Encaustic lends itself to being applied in layers; each layer is fused by heat to whatever is beneath it. This can produce an actual depth and glow peculiar to this medium. In her latest grids she uses layers of wax glazes to build up translucent colors that seem to glow from within. Previous encaustic pieces have combined the grid with other layered images and collage elements. Some also use dense layers of twigs and seeds collaged under wax. She does oil paintings and assemblages as well as encaustic paintings, but in recent years she has concentrated on encaustic. This medium is so versatile that she is still exploring ways to use it; it has opened up new expressive possibilities that are very exciting.

Lew Graham has been painting for many years, after studying at the Art Students League in New York City and the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford, England. She has shown and sold my work primarily in galleries and other exhibition spaces. Her early and middle bodies of work have been realistic, and have explored the play of light and shadow in various subjects. These subjects narrowed down more and more to solely landscape. The landscapes quickly became terescapes, with light and shadow assuming an important role in their composition. As she progressed toward abstraction, her images used both real branches as well as branching and growth forms. Natural growth is their subject. Most recently Graham has been employing the grid as an organizing structure. She likes the play of natural motifs against the intellectual principle of the grid. The next phase of work, represented by the pieces in this exhibition, has dispensed with natural forms and is focused on variations of a color hue within the grid. These works are executed in encaustic, which is a hot wax medium. Encaustic, which is typically applied in layers, has the luminous quality and the depth which give these pieces life and motion. Graham notes that she is still looking for light.
Tom Grubb

Tom Grubb encaustic star charts and site-specific sculptures are created in part to draw attention to the issues of Climate Change and Global Warming and to the Exploration of Space. Working as a sea captain on commercial fishing boats in the North Atlantic Ocean inspired him to create star charts which explore the dimensions of time and space. Visualizing the depth of the ocean and converting this data in his mind to a three dimensional model gave him the inspiration to carry the concept skyward and create his celestial star charts which are abstract maps of the heavens. He uses bamboo, string, wax and ink on parchment paper to create the encaustic mixed media collage constructions. Instead of focusing on the navigation of ships on the sea Grubb seeks through these works to focus man's attention toward the wise use of our natural resources and the exploration of the heavens. He believes that the arts and sciences are closely connected to the health of the human spirit. It is through this seeking of the unknown that one can grow and develop as a human being on planet earth. Grubb creates these works of art that are part ancient, part futuristic and part spiritual to inspire the viewer to consider the unlimited possibilities of exploring earth and the universe. He seeks through these works to focus man's attention toward space and the exploration of the heavens and toward the preservation and wise use of our natural resources.

Tom Grubb was born in Lexington, North Carolina, and has been a professional artist installing monumental site-specific sculptures in the United States and abroad since 1980. He was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts project grant for his sculpture Star Gate 2003 in 2002. He was chosen to be in the ambassador program People to People to represent artists from the United States on a trip to Russia in 1991. The Arts Council of North Carolina chose Tom to receive the North Carolina Visual Artist Fellowship in 1987. Grubb is currently working in his studio in Eastover, North Carolina, drawing, designing and fabricating sculptures that will be installed in climatically sensitive sites throughout the world to draw public attention to the Global Warming.

Top: The Word
Center: Orion—The Hunter
Bottom: North Pole Voyager Expedition
In this series of encaustic paintings, the pieces have imagery that evoke a sense of narrative or memory, with figures, human or animal, emerging from mysterious environments, some of which seem to be actual places, others only patterns from nature or elements of life. Some of these pieces were inspired by the Gulf oil spill, where sea turtles and their food source, jellyfish, were in danger. In all the pieces Alix Hitchcock strives for contrast between the illusion of visual depth and actual two-dimensional surface color and textures. Color relationships and overlapping imagery are important for creating these illusions and atmospheres. The sensual nature of the wax, whether opaque or translucent, is meant to draw the viewer in and engage them in this illusory world.

Hitchcock received her Masters in Art in painting from New York University in 1983, and her Bachelor of Fine Arts in printmaking and painting from the University of N.C. at Greensboro in 1973. She has been an Instructor in Drawing at Wake Forest University since 1989, and has also taught art at several other institutions. Hitchcock was the Winston-Salem Artist of the Year in 1998, and is a founding board member of Artworks Gallery, a cooperative gallery in Winston-Salem. She has exhibited widely in NC, including Hawthorne Gallery, Salem College Fine Arts Gallery, Greens Hill Center for NC Art, The Center for Creative Leadership, and Weatherspoon Art Gallery in Greensboro, Meredith College and Lee Hanley Gallery in Raleigh, among others. Her art has also been published in two textbooks. Her work appears in many public collections, such as the Kenan Institute for the Arts in W-S, NC, Forsyth Memorial Hospital, Duke University Woman’s Clinic, Womble Carlyle Firm, Exclusive Furniture Development Inc., N.C. National Bank, Wachovia Bank, The Benefits Group, G.M. Volvo Heavy Truck Co., Twisted Paper Products, and Wake Forest University.

Alix Hitchcock

Top Left: Transfer
Bottom Left: Moon Jellyfish and the Spill
Top Right: Reflection
Bottom Right: Turtle Bones
While exploring subject matter that interests me, Patricia Kilburg likes to employ a variety of media. Recently she has been exploring the use of encaustic, the ancient art of painting with wax. Creating contrast between transparent and opaque colors, and textured and smooth surfaces, showcase some of my favorite qualities of encaustic. I also enjoy combining oil paints, charcoal, inks, and paper with the wax.

A recurring theme in my work is the ambiguity of time and space. By employing architectural, historical, and natural images, and the use of symbols, she seeks to suggest eternity, mortality, and the fragility of existence. Kilburg aims for complex texture and simple forms in my paintings, with “secret places” for the eye to go and the imagination to be triggered. There is a sense of mystery and ambivalence, where reality is momentarily suspended, evoking the viewer’s own feelings and experiences.

A studio artist residing in Greenville, SC, Kilburg has exhibited throughout the United States, and internationally through the Art in the Embassies program. Her work has been featured in several publications, including American Craft, Sandlapper Magazine, and Magazine of the American Folk Art Museum, NY. Her piece “Urban Mother and Child” was commissioned by the Women’s Board of Rush/St. Luke’s Hospital, Chicago, IL. “Romanesque VII” was featured in the Mint Museum of Craft and Design, Charlotte, NC.

Kilburg studied at DePaul University, Chicago, IL, Greenville County Museum School of Art, Greenville, SC, and Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN. She has been a regular participant in classes and workshops affiliated with the annual Quilt Surface Design Symposium, Columbus, OH.

She further honed her skills in mixed media by participating in the annual Encaustic Artists Conference at Montserrat College in Beverly, MA, and related workshops. She is a member of IEA (International Encaustic Artists). Ms. Kilburg is currently teaching workshops in encaustic offered by the Greenville County Museum of Art and Furman University Continuing Education Program.
Joyce Watkins King notes that it’s not surprising that she found her way back to working with textiles, having a mother who was an excellent seamstress, not only making clothes for family members, but for friends and neighbors. As a child, Watkins King spent many Saturday afternoons in Leggetts Department store choosing patterns and fabrics, eventually learning to design and make my own creations. While studying at the College of Design, she was drawn to courses in product design/fashion design and earned a minor in textiles. In fact, her first paid position was designing upholstery fabrics for high-end NC furniture makers Henredon and Thayer Coggin. She guesses in some way she is simply reaching back to my earliest creative experiences with textiles, but exploring them in a very different way, unconnected to their original functionality.

Since July Watkins King has continued to work with textiles, exploring dimensional surfaces, techniques for creating larger works from smaller components, the effects of lighting, and the influence of color in her compositions. She is currently creating a new body of work for an upcoming exhibition at Flanders Gallery in Raleigh. Watkins King particularly likes this thought from artist Amy Sillman: “Art is about presenting challenging space that can’t be footnoted or captioned precisely. It exceeds description alone. Difficult work partly throws the weight of interpretation onto the viewer’s shoulders and moves beyond nicely mannered captioned presentation.”

Joyce Watkins King was born and raised in Oxford, NC. Raleigh has been her home since 1975 when she accepted a full scholarship to the College of Design at NC State University. In addition to a B.A. in Visual Design/Product Design and a Minor in Textiles, she holds an MBA from NC State. In 2004, Watkins King received a scholarship for a mixed media class with artist Clarence Morgan at Penland School. There her eyes were opened to the joys of creating abstract work. She immersed myself in an organic process of art-making that fully engaged my whole being and offered a much higher level of satisfaction. Watkins King began her first residency in July 2011, and began incorporating textiles—lace, cheesecloth, and gauze—as well as rice papers into her artwork. The result of the residency opportunity, being free to immerse herself in working free from the usual daily interruptions, was the discovery of a new art-making language employing textiles and encaustic.
Jane Allen Nodine gain inspiration from a variety of sources including nature, popular culture, history, and by all means, living and working in the South. Currently she is working on a body of image-based pieces that parallel an abstract series of patterns and textures inspired by natural aging, transformation, and processes of oxidation. The non-objective abstractions incorporate naturally occurring marks and patterns made from iron oxidation, better known as rust, with burn marks and monotypes pulled from various surfaces. The patterns and marks are applied to panels between layers of paper, pigment, and encaustic wax. As the layers develop, some elements become obscured in the hazy film of the wax, as others become more evident and appear to float or come forward in the luminous properties of the material. Years of working as a jewelry–metalsmith has given her a keen sense of heat as a tool for making art, and the molten wax feeds her desire for working in a liquid state that moves to a cooled, firm, and durable material. The encaustic process, and the endless capabilities of wax, including the warm honey aroma, the historical significance, and luscious surfaces, have energized her ideas and opened new directions in her work. Visual and conceptual clues reveal ideas and images that emerge in both anticipated and unexpected ways but destination is never the same twice, and there is no map, no definitive ending or preconceived plan of travel; only a sense that something waits to be revealed.

Jane Allen Nodine is Professor of Art and director of the Curtis R. Harley Gallery at the University of South Carolina Upstate. Prior to joining the University she owned and operated Jane Nodine Hardwear, a full-service jewelry design and manufacturing company. Nodine’s work has taken many forms over the years including drawing, painting, metals, installation and photography. She has exhibited throughout the US and in Europe, including national exhibitions at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, the Mary Brogan Museum, Turchin Center for the Visual Arts, National Arts Club, NYC, South Carolina State Museum, Greenville Museum of Art, the Alte Kaserne Winterthur, Switzerland, and SECCA, Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art. In 2006 Nodine began research in encaustic wax and quickly developed a national presence. Nodine’s work in has been selected for the inaugural edition of “Encaustic Works ’11”, to be published by R&F Handmade Paints Inc., and a series of her works were acquired by the Medical University of South Carolina for the Ashley River Towers Contemporary Carolina Collection, the largest body of contemporary art in South Carolina.
Pat Spainhour paintings are non-representational. However, she is amused at what viewers find within my work. It thrills her to engage the viewer and each person’s perspective is unique. She works in oils and pastels, but she is most enthusiastic about encaustic paint. The use of warm colored wax is exciting and the results are often unplanned. She loses herself in the flow of color and chance happenings. Inspiration, for her, can be found in the work of American Modernists Arthur Dove and Georgia O’Keeffe. It is my goal to create an organic flow of curved planes and color contours that is often seen in their work. To accomplish this, she concentrates on color combinations, texture, movement, and use of space. Spainhour is a contemporary painter credited with thirty years of teaching experience. Her artistic ability is exemplified by her use of oil paint, pastels, and her favorite, encaustic paint. Spainhour has a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, with concentrations in Design and Art Education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. In recent years, she has focused her attention on the use of encaustic paint. Pat developed an interest in encaustic painting at the Penland School of Crafts, studying under Tremain Smith. She has attended the International Encaustic Painters Conference on Cape Cod. Spainhour was awarded the 2009 North Carolina Arts Council Regional Artist Grant, which she used to attend Paula Roland’s Advanced Encaustic Workshop in Santa Fe, NM. She has exhibited widely on the East Coast and her work can be seen in numerous corporate collections. She is represented by Hampton House Gallery, and teaches Advanced Placement Art History at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.