

EXHIBIT

Area artists look 'far and near'

Lisa Barthelson and Kay Hartung explore the landscapes and the microscopic world

By Chris Bergeron
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FRAMINGHAM - In their perfectly titled show "far and near," Lisa Barthelson and Kay Hartung explore panoramic and microscopic landscapes through new work now displayed at Fountain Street Fine Art gallery.

Barthelson and Hartung have each separately shown their evolving art in the first-floor gallery at 59 Fountain St. founded by painter Cheryl Clinton and photographer Marie Craig. This exhibit is their first show together.

After a residency in south central Oregon, Barthelson has created monoprints and mixed media work that reflect the unexpected textures and dry palette of the remote desert basin where she stayed and studied.

Originally a painter, she has worked in a wide variety of media including printmaking, ceramics, photography, site-specific installations and found-object construction.

Explaining the genesis of the art in this show, Barthelson said her September 2014 Playa Fellowship Residency provided an inspiring exposure to a primordial landscape that was the antithesis of her native New England.

For this exhibit, the Rutland resident has moved beyond "the chaos and clutter" of her prior "family debris" series to create complex, dense

images that seem to be the visual equivalent of the new environment that so moved her.

Gallery co-founder Cheryl Clinton described Barthelson's new work as "a real departure" from her earlier mixed-media assemblages and bold encaustics that "had a lot happening on the surface."

She said Barthelson's new work initially "looks quieter and more subdued with a quite lovely meditative quality."

"Overall, a visitor's first impression of her new work might be that it's fairly quiet," Clinton said. "As you look closer, each image has the characteristic buzz of Barthelson's distinctive imagery. There's an underlying energy and an earthy, connected feeling."

Craig speculated Hartung and Barthelson wanted to exhibit together because both were interested in creating elemental shapes and forms but from different perspectives.

Looking inward, Hartung is showing encaustic paintings of haunting beauty that reflect her "fascination with the microscopic world."

Her artistic focus shifted dramatically several years ago after viewing electron microscope photos of colon cancer cells, the disease that killed her mother when she was a teenager.

In addition to her paintings, Hartung is showing a three-dimensional, 16-by-8 foot installation that includes encaustic paint, fabric, ropes and ribbons and covers the rear gallery wall to a depth of six inches.

Craig observed, "When an artist like Hartung works with encaustics,

it feels like layers upon layers."

"Viewers feel like they can look through it. There's a sense of depth. We don't normally see things microscopically. There's a sense of awe when we can look and enjoy really tiny things in her art," she said.

Looking beyond the microscopic toward the cosmic, Hartung has been creating deeply personal art by drawing with fire to produce fascinating elemental organic shapes and forms.

By exploring the connections between science and art, the Acton resident said she was "conscious of the profound effects that these minute biological forms have on the universe."

For Craig, Hartung's art creates a bifocal effect of looking "near and far" at the same time.

"Her work is full of shapes and orbs that circle and swirl," said Craig. "If you look one way, you can imagine you're looking through a microscope. Use your imagination and you can imagine stars and the cosmos."

Barthelson and Hartung will discuss their work at an artist's reception at 3 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 28. A "snow date" has been set for March 1 at 3 p.m.

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