

# Hot Wax in the Summer Time

The Museum of Encaustic Art focuses on the near and present danger of global warming

BY IRIS McLISTER

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During a recent Sunbathing Sunday™, a friend fished out a book about occult practices. The subject is not really my bag, but got me thinking about how we like to learn about things; specifically, how we either like to be surprised by information or not, book-wise.

There's no right or wrong way to pick up a book. Every reader has their own style, born from the primordial goop of our first inklings of what we do and don't want to know about. Growing up in rural Florida, emerging from the aforementioned goop can be tricky—yet Mom found ways to inspire Sis and me in the almost-always-empty, air-conditioned bliss of our county's public libraries. It was here where I first discovered Mom did something confounding: She would pick up a book and head straight for its very last page, reading the conclusion usually with a barely perceptible, satisfied little nod, then almost always put the book back on the shelf. Because she usually turns up her nose at fiction (to which I still silently wail, "But Cheever! But Murdoch! *But Updike!*") this is her pattern, her means of appraising the ultimate readability of a book.

Art shows don't have much in common with novels, I don't think; but those with names like *Global Warming is REAL* appeal to Mom, who doesn't like curve balls, and me, who wants surprises. In any case, a show about global warming seems important in an age of fake news and Alex

Jones—an age when a sizable percentage of our country believes lizard people roam the earth. "Facts matter" is the weirdly not-currently-straightforward thesis of *Global Warming is REAL*, which opens this Saturday afternoon at the Museum of Encaustic Art.

During a recent visit to the surprisingly large space, near Joseph's on Agua Fria Street, I learned the organization is the largest of its kind in the world. Who knew?

COURTESY MUSEUM OF ENCAUSTIC ART



Washington-based encaustic artist Fiona Huthcinson's "Declining Colony" was created with encaustic wax and oil paints—plus, look at that bee. We like it.

Encaustic work is relatively rare in the larger scheme of art things, even though people have been making artwork with beeswax since 450 BC, and you almost certainly have worked with wax yourself—Crayola crayons, anyone?

Now in its second iteration, the show's focus, says Museum Director and Founder Douglas Mehrens, will always be on global warming. "Always," he repeats with a wry chuckle, "until global warming doesn't exist anymore."

Of course, this isn't likely to be the case anytime soon, and though Mehrens isn't thrilled with the current political situation, he says carefully, "I didn't want the show to be images of Trump, or be overly politicized." That leaves a large group—50 artists in all, selected from a pool of over 80 applicants—whose work relates to, but doesn't necessarily directly address, the show's theme.

Mehrens cites Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* as inspiration. "I thought this would be a really great topic for artists to reflect on," he says, "to examine how we assimilate and personalize scientific information about global warming."

Most of the artists, only around a fifth of whom are local, work in the technique of hot wax painting, using heated beeswax to which pigment is added, then applying it in liquid or paste form to the surface of any number of materials. One particularly striking piece, "Entropy II" by Belen Millan, came all the way from Spain: a large wood panel, soaked with warm, fire-toned washes of color, with a bottom ridge splattered in dripping wax. Many others in the show, which will be up through early September, look deceptively like paintings, with relatively flat appearances whose true nature only emerges upon closer inspection, belying a depth that's somehow both opaque and luminous. Local artist Angel Wynn's "Ain't No Joke" seems to address the theme of global warming, albeit cautiously, with a lone and weirdly lonely looking dead tree surrounded by blue sky above and parched earth below. Some of the works are for sale, based on the artist's decision—an unorthodox choice for museum exhibitions, and one I'd like to see repeated more often.

The institution also has lectures scheduled, as well as an open mic and programs for children as part of the exhibition.

I suppose if you *did* think about the show's title as a book, it would be somewhat of a "gotcha" title, since entering the museum provides an opportunity to see works that aren't always obviously linked to our ever-hotter planet. Still, sometimes it's good to know what you're getting into from the very start—right, Mom? 🐝

## GLOBAL WARMING IS REAL OPENING RECEPTION

Noon-5 pm Saturday, July 14. \$5-\$9.  
Museum of Encaustic Art,  
632 Agua Fria St., 989-3283