



Encaustic painter Leslie Neumann lives in Aripeka in a home overlooking salt marshes and the Gulf of Mexico. The beauty of the Florida landscape inspires her work, although she does not always choose to represent it realistically.

LESLIE NEUMANN, ENCAUSTIC

APPLY, REHEAT, REPEAT

Leslie Neumann creates paintings. Using heat. It is an uncommon combination.

Neumann works in encaustic, an ancient medium not widely known or used today in which wax is melted and painted onto a Masonite or wood board. Canvas rarely is used since the wax does not adhere well to fabric.

The most famous examples of encaustic are Fayum mummy portraits dating from the Roman occupation of Egypt in the first century A.D.

Neumann, 58, has lived and worked in Aripeka since 1991.

Until she was in her mid 30s, she painted in oils in a loft in New York City, where she had lived most of her life.

She switched venues and materials at about the same time.

The first was planned: She married an artist with a place in Aripeka, a tiny town on the Gulf of Mexico along the border of Pasco and Hernando counties.

The second, she says, "was completely unintentional. A friend had the wax, tried it, didn't like it and gave it to me. I was young enough that I was open to a new idea. As soon as I tried encaustic, that was it."

The marriage ended about five years ago, but by then Neumann had bonded as strongly to Aripeka as wax bonds to her Masonite.

She had also switched subject matter, from figurative images to landscapes.

"The landscape was so beautiful here," she says, "and there weren't many people around."

Her works have become less realistic as time has passed. "I'm very interested in surface effects and luminosity. You can create that with oil, but it takes so long to dry. As soon as you put wax down, it becomes cool enough that you can put more on top of it."

She builds up layers of colored wax, each bonded to the previous one with a heat gun. She scrapes it, "mushes" it, reheats and reapplies until she achieves the dense, mysterious vistas that seem more the work of the mind than the eye. She still uses oil paint, which is compatible with encaustic, for what she calls "atmospheric effects" and glazes, smoothing it on with her hands while the wax is soft but not too hot. When a work is complete, she buffs it by hand.

"After painting with encaustics for almost two decades," Neumann says, "it is my friend — but a friend that still yields surprises and happy accidents."

For more information, go to leslieneumann.com.



Leslie Neumann uses her hands to work oil paint into the warm wax (top). The oil produces what she calls "an atmospheric effect," mostly for the backgrounds of her encaustic paintings. The artist works on a flat surface so the melted wax won't drip. When a layer of wax has dried, she usually hangs the painting on a studio wall to get a better look at the work in progress.

