

Weighty messages, quickly encrypted HOT TICKET

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Encaustic painting is, without doubt, a stubborn, curmudgeonly technique. It involves mixing pigment into hot wax and working it onto a surface very quickly, since the wax hardens in seconds. Probably first used as an art medium in ancient Egyptian mummy portraits, it has been embraced by few subsequent artists. But, in the right hands, it's worth the effort, producing a luminous, textured skin and the potential for great nuance. Jasper Johns' Flag paintings from the 1950s are among the finest examples of encaustic virtuosity you'll find.

Locally, Leslie Neumann uses encaustic, along with oil paint, in service to her mystical landscapes. An exhibition of 34 paintings, 22 of them new works, including Spirit Guides, shown above, is on display at KingdonAlan Gallery, 70 Beach Drive NE, St. Petersburg, through Nov. 13. She builds up her surfaces into dense forests, slashed by rivers and pierced with flames and sparks, which make no pretense of literalness. Into the warm wax, Neumann carves cryptic symbols and figures that resemble those in prehistoric caves. That they are landscapes as states of mind is underscored by messages she leaves behind - hellos and goodbyes, joy or sorrow.

Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday or by appointment. (727) 825-0111.

- LENNIE BENNETT, Times art critic