

DARLA BJORK

Artist Statement

One of the first things that I do when I get in my studio is turn on music. Usually classical – Bach or Beethoven, sometimes jazz – Miles Davis or piano. Then I get to work, often on a painting that I have gotten “stuck” on but sometimes I find myself picking up an old wood panel that has been sitting around waiting to get scraped down and reworked. I work with layers of oil stick and often etch back to the underlying wax.

For the past few years I have been making grid-like structure that evolve into my weaving series. These consciously evoke the warp and weft of the woven rugs that I as a child watched my maternal grandmother made on her large loom in her basement.

The “Crossroads Series” are about the same size as many of her rugs but where her lines were rigid and uniform, mine are seemingly random crossings and overlapping color. These were pre-Covid when the world seemed brighter and full of promise. After the Covid shutdown I along with most people struggled to readjust and learn new coping skills, some as simple as wearing a mask. I switched back to my favorite color - blue - and found by chance an indigo blue that seemed right for this crisis. As I was luckily sheltering in place in Woodstock for weeks at a time, I tried to imagine how people in the large cities trapped in small apartments were coping and started the Covid Windows series as a tribute to those people but also to those who did not survive the virus.

While my work is quite abstract, I nevertheless paint primitive, fairly ambiguous forms that allow the viewer to read into the work their own stories. These narratives sometimes baffle but at other times enlighten me.

Over the past several years I have painted series with themes around water, fire, windows and fences as I have become intrigued with the old stone fences, falling into ruins, marking the property lines of our house in Woodstock. In my latest series, “Sanctuary”, I have explored nature as a meditation space where water, plant life and sunlight flow together as vibrant liquids.

Darla Bjork is a painter who has exhibited in the United States and Europe. Her work has evolved from abstract portraits that reflected her “other life” as a psychiatrist when she was working with people in mental institutions to her present abstract landscapes influenced by her childhood in rural Minnesota and now by the view of the Catskill Mountains from her studio in Woodstock, NY. For the past several years she has worked almost exclusively with encaustics and then oil stick on wood panels.

In 1984 she was a founding member of Ceres Gallery, a women run, non-profit collective gallery in downtown Manhattan. In 1996 she left this gallery and joined SOHO20 Gallery, a women’s collective gallery founded in 1973. She has had several solo shows, participated in group shows and served in administrative capacities in each of these galleries. Most recently she has served as chair of the SOHO20 Board of Advisors.