

DARLA BJORK

Full Bio by Carol Capper

Darla Bjork was born and raised in rural Minnesota and moved to New York City after finishing medical school in 1965. She came to do a residency in psychiatry and remained in the city working as a psychiatrist even after developing her art career in 1980. While her years of treating people with mental health issues might seem far removed from art, certainly there is a depth of appreciation and understanding of the human psyche that has continued to contribute to her creative efforts.

She currently maintains a studio in Woodstock, NY. Also a lover of music, both studios are most often filled with the sounds of Bach or Beethoven (and sometimes jazz). Darla describes putting on music as the beginning of her work in the studio.

Her work is abstract but the form has varied and evolved over her career with changes in the medium used, technique and interplay of color and texture. Over the past several years she has been working with layers of encaustic and/or oil stick and often etches back to the underlying wax, creating shifting dimensions and perspectives. She describes painting “primitive, fairly ambiguous forms that allow the viewer to read into the work their own stories.”

Darla’s inspiration draws from a range of areas that includes childhood memories, forms in nature, landscapes and of course the senses and emotions accompanying these experiences. Her multi-layered appreciations of life yields multi layered paintings.

For several years she had been making what she referred to as “grid-like structures” that evolved into “weavings of random crossings and overlapping color.” Of this Crossroads Series she says “these consciously evoke the warp and weft of the woven rugs that I as a child watched my maternal grandmother make on a large loom in her basement.”

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In another series called Sanctuary, Darla explores nature as a meditative space where “water, plantlife and sunlight flow together as vibrant liquids.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, while sheltering in place in Woodstock for extended periods, she began work on what became the COVID Windows series. These paintings suggest the windows of city buildings where people might be sheltering. Darla sees this series of work as a tribute to those hoping to stay safe in their apartments and also to those who succumbed to the virus.

In her most recent body of work, she has returned to encaustics. These new pieces center on amorphous silhouettes rendered in deep resonant tones, such as Egyptian purple, that at first glance may appear black, but upon closer observation reveal subtle chromatic complexity. The figures often appear masked or partially obscured by haze or smoke, evoking a sense of concealment as well as emergence. This shift in material and imagery is connected to the passing of her partner two years ago, suggesting Bjork’s movement through grief, dissolution, the unseen, and towards transformation.

Ever cognizant of the historical role and efforts of women artists generally, Darla became a founding member of the women run non-profit collective, Ceres Gallery, in downtown Manhattan. In 1996 she left to join SOHO20 Gallery, also a women’s collective, founded in 1973. She has had solo shows and participated in group exhibits and served in administrative capacities in both galleries. Most recently she has served as chair of the SOHO20 Board of Advisors.

Darla’s paintings have appeared in many solo and group shows and her work has been reviewed in various publications. A detailed list can be found in her CV.