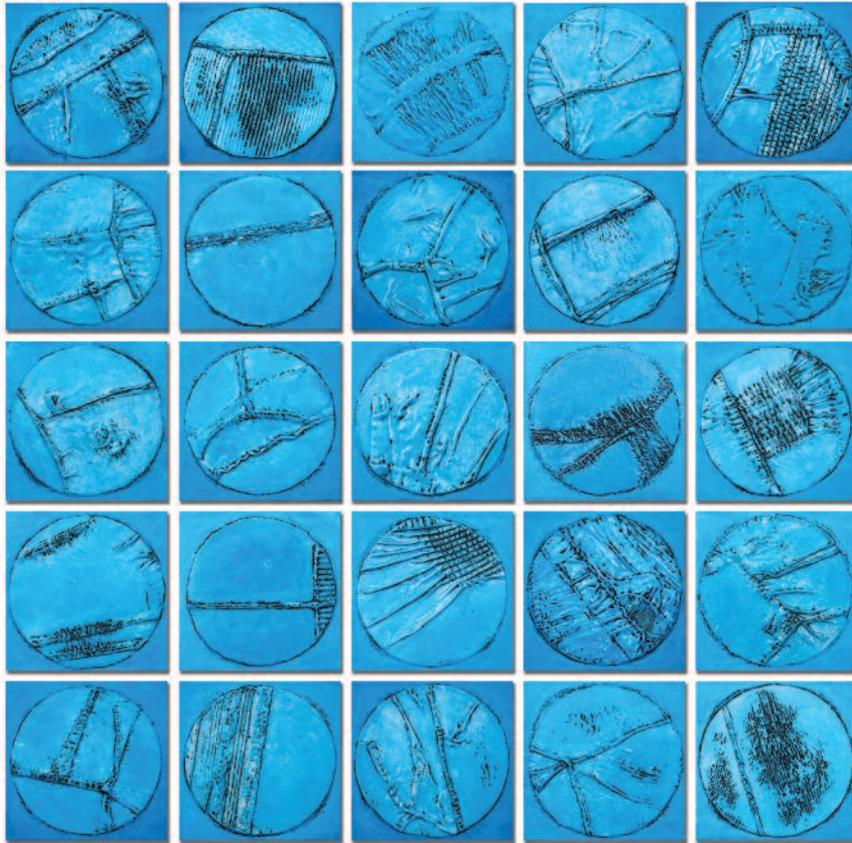


Susan Lasch Krevitt

The Rhythm of the Hand

by Nancy Natale



C A self-described “maker and builder,” Susan Lasch Krevitt focuses on process to create new art forms and objects. In the tradition of artists such as Eva Hesse, El Anatsui, and Mark Bradford, she works with unconventional materials and explores her way to something new using process and manipulation, often combining repetitive shapes and forms. The visual repetition of working in multiples creates what Lasch Krevitt calls “the rhythm of the hand.” She has worked almost exclusively with textiles, encaustic, and mixed media in recent years, but she does not call herself a “fiber artist” or an “encaustic artist.” In college at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the 1970s, she concentrated on sculptural processes, such as woodworking, welding, ceramics, fine metals, and cloisonné. Textiles came later.

Somewhat surprisingly, Lasch Krevitt relates her fiber and mixed-media work to dance. She sees the curved forms and movements made in space by dancing bodies as analogous to shapes and forms produced by her manipulation of textiles and other materials. Physically handling and experimenting with them to see what she can do is the most important part of her creative process. It is her method for discovering what a particular material

can do that it was not manufactured to do and which structural system she can scale up or down to work with it. Understanding how integral movement is to the objects she makes provides insight into her somewhat eccentric creations.

Lasch Krevitt remembers an early experience of seeing a performance choreographed by Merce Cunningham, where all the dancers, male and female, wore flesh-colored bodysuits. The color did not make them appear naked, but evened out the different proportions of individual limbs and bodies. "They moved together in a tight group and also alone or in smaller groups, very abstract, no story, only movement—the sweep of an arm, the flex of an ankle were shapes described by movement. . . . Visually, a beautiful shape is the end product of the artist's dance with materials, movement translated into form."

The use of textiles as a major component in her work did not come about until the late 1980s, after relocating from Chicago to Los Angeles and beginning a family. Her father died suddenly in 1988, and she brought some of his shirts and ties back to California. A year after his death, Lasch Krevitt used this clothing to make a memory quilt. While the quilt served as a way of

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connecting with her father's presence, quilting held little attraction. In the shirts themselves, however, she discovered buttonhole plackets, collars, pockets, and cuffs. These dimensional components appealed to her as ready-made shapes that could be combined into art.

Decades later, the multi-panel work *Found Geometry* (2013), demonstrates Lasch Krevitt's affinity for the seams and folds that give clothing its form and function.

Lasch Krevitt had previously worked with non-woven interfacing and cotton batting, but after making the quilt, she realized that by choosing to work primarily with textiles, she could eliminate the need for specialized equipment and reduce the scale of workspace. She began using repurposed clothing of wool, silk, and cotton to create wall work that was abstract, patterned, and serially pieced. Such works as *Dark Reflection*, *Red Moon Rising*, and *Ripples and Waves* were machine sewn and often featured seams on the front of the piece to add texture and color. Unsatisfied with the way this work hung on the wall, she felt that her textile pieces did not have enough presence compared to paintings; framing under glass seemed visually distancing. Earlier use of Rhoplex acrylic emulsion had added more dimension, but

LEFT: SUSAN LASCH KREVITT *Found Geometry* Repurposed cotton clothing, encaustic, oil stick, on birch panel, 10" x 10" each, 25 panels, 2013.

BELOW: SUSAN LASCH KREVITT combined image of: *Dark Reflection* (Repurposed wool, silk, yarn, glass beads, hand and machine stitching, 10" x 8", 2005); *Red Moon Rising* (Repurposed wool, silk, yarn, hand and machine stitching, 10" x 8", 2005); *Ripples and Waves* (Repurposed wool, silk, glass beads, hand and machine stitching, 10" x 9", 2005).

All photos by Michael M. Krevitt.





SUSAN LASCH KREVITT *Red Fold* Repurposed wool and encaustic on wood, 6" x 6", 2010.

she stopped using it after the birth of her children because of its strong odor and fear that its use could be harmful. Water-soluble stabilizer and heavy stitching made pieces more rigid and substantial, but not enough to solve the problem she perceived.

In 2006, Lasch Krevitt discovered encaustic (beeswax and damar resin), and it "provided a whole new set of options: color, method of joining pieces, a way of building more dimensionally, and, most of all, a rigidity that conveyed permanence, strength, muscle—all the things that fiber on its own is not."

Encaustic transformed her work by allow-

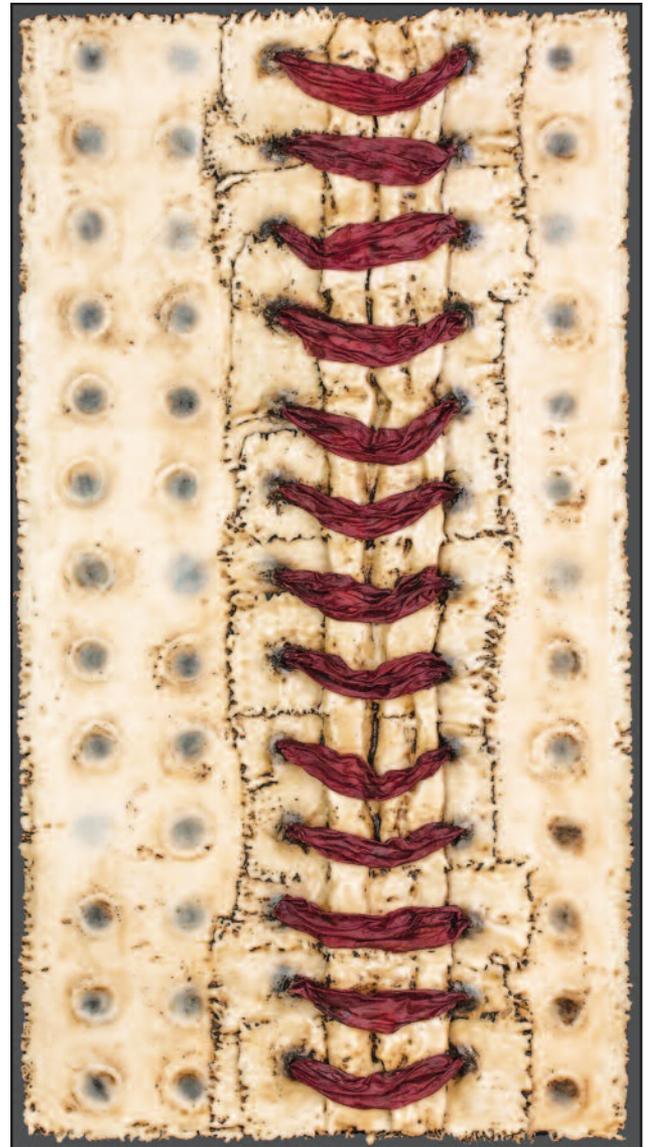
ing her to employ textiles more sculpturally. By saturating a textile with encaustic and then fusing it in place with heat, she could capture or "freeze" a swoop of draping and it would stay just as she had placed it, such as in *Red Fold* and *Blue Fold*. She could overlap colors and layer textiles as formable substrates to make more dimensional works. She was liberated from the sewing machine, from framed work, and from using methods of attachment that might interfere with her intention for the work.

Lasch Krevitt began experimenting and learning how to use encaustic to achieve the results she wanted. She produced several early se-

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ries, beginning in 2008 with one that used repurposed silk with encaustic. Pieces such as *Your Move* demonstrated her somewhat organic geometry and sense of humor. This series also overcame what she thought of as “the beauty problem.” To her way of thinking, encaustic’s soft, lush surface and brilliant colors could make it look almost too beautiful as a medium and apt to be dismissed as decorative. When she combined encaustic with silk, another beautiful material, Lasch Krevitt treated them both in a non-precious way, cutting up the silk, scorching it, dipping it in hot wax and otherwise destroying a beautiful garment. “This was the last thing anyone expected to happen to it, but the act of defiling and then reclaiming it was transformative, for both the work and myself. Taking what was ‘precious’ and destroying it was giving it new importance.”

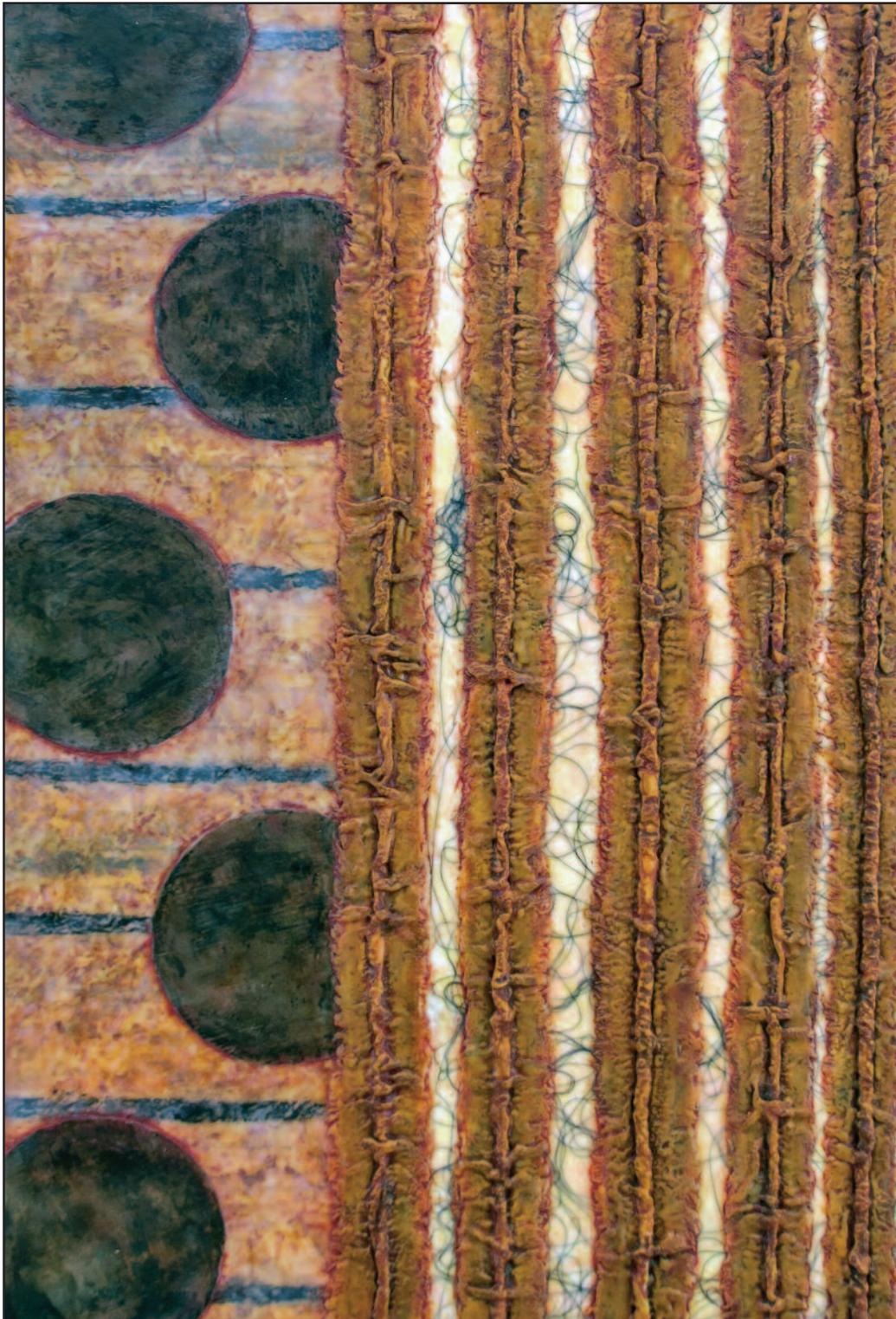
The 2014 series *Constrict/Construct* is certainly not decorative. A gallerist who saw the works complimented her by calling them “sexy/creepy.” The pieces used new canvas rather than repurposed clothing, plus several other materials. Lasch Krevitt was thinking of the canvas as a nod to painting, but she also found the heavier weight of the textile useful for making work that stood up to burning, scorching, lashing, staining, and dimensional attachment of multiple segments.



ABOVE: SUSAN LASCH KREVITT *Bound 13* Scorched canvas, silk, oil stick, encaustic, on wood, 33" x 18", 2014.

LEFT: SUSAN LASCH KREVITT *Your Move* Wool, silk, encaustic, machine stitching, piecing, on cradled birch panel, 12" x 12", 2010.

"...a rigidity that conveyed permanence, strength, muscle—all the things that fiber on its own is not."



SUSAN LASCH KREVITT *Burnt Offering: Riparian Flow* Repurposed wool, scorched cotton, thread, oil stick and encaustic on cradled panel, 36" x 24", 2013.



ABOVE: SUSAN LASCH KREVITT *Witness* Cotton batting, rubber, cotton rags, wool ribbon, oil stick, encaustic, 8" x 12", 2014.
 RIGHT: SUSAN LASCH KREVITT *Low Tide I* Scorched canvas, rubber, cashmere fiber, encaustic, on cradled panel, 24" x 12", 2015.



The *Constrict/Construct* series was first exhibited in *Material Consequences*, the 2014 group show that Lasch Krevitt and I co-curated at Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, Truro, Massachusetts, in conjunction with the curatorial program of the annual International Encaustic Conference. Of the several wall works, some hung without an armature such as *Safe Keeping*, while others were attached to wood panels such as *Bound 13*. An innovation in this series was the introduction of "batons," hand-formed elements of canvas with rubber and other mixed media. Lasch Krevitt said that the batons "display[ed] the nuance of form that I find visually hypnotic." Such subtleties seemed to evoke figuration in the freestanding piece *Witness*, where the batons each assumed a unique stance that implied individuals in a group, reminiscent of the Merce Cunningham dancers.

Overt conceptual agendas have never been a driving force for Lasch Krevitt's work. Instead, she emphasizes the process of making objects that "evoke past (or future) human existence, a record of hands at work with no specific narrative." The activity of creating works with emphasis on processes of construction may lead Lasch Krevitt into several directions in the future. She plans to continue working with new canvas to make dimensional work, both freestanding and wall hung. However, using only the achromatic canvas would deprive her of the joy of hunting for repurposed materials that provide a variety of options. Colored textiles and pigmented paint may prove attractive

and allow her to employ less labor-intensive manipulation to create such recent works as *Low Tide I* and *Low Tide II*.

As her experimental process-driven work evolves, Lasch Krevitt has become an expert on methods of combining textiles with encaustic. She is a featured demonstrator and teacher annually at The International Encaustic Conference in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and her enthusiasm for passing along her knowledge to students is contagious—and destined to influence a new group of artists who may become as intrigued with process as their teacher.

Susan Lasch Krevitt's solo show *Fragments, Relics and Artifacts* is on display at Conejo Valley Art Museum in Thousand Oaks, California (through March 11, 2016); 805-492-8778. www.cvam.us
www.susanlaschkrevitt.com

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