March 18, 2021

From The Collection: Diana González Gandolfi

Diana González Gandolfi, *Suddenly Heard*, encaustic collage and pigment stick on panel, 16” x 16”, 2000.

Diana González Gandolfi is a painter-printmaker with an extensive exhibition record of solo and group shows including the Hunterdon Art Museum in Clinton, NJ; The Noyes Museum, Oceanville, NJ; The Newark Museum, in Newark, NJ; The De Cordova and Lincoln Museum in Lincoln, MA; The Boston Museum of Fine Arts; The Print Club in Philadelphia, PA; The Bronx Museum of Art; The Boston Public Library; and The International Print Center in NYC to name a few. She has also shown internationally in invitational print exhibitions at the Yinchuan Art Gallery in Yinchuan, China; the Khmu Art Museum in Tallinn, Estonia; Altos de Chevron Gallery in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic; and Centre d’art du Mont-Royale in Montreal, Canada.

R&F is delighted to have a painting by Diana as part of our permanent collection. We chatted with Diana recently about her education, her process, where her titles come from, and how the many places she’s lived have influenced the ideas behind her work.

Please share a little bit about your background - education, where you've lived, how you got started with printmaking and painting.

Originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, I spent part of my childhood living in Bogotá, Colombia and Bandung, Indonesia and came to the United States in 1965, at a time of serious social, cultural, and political changes. My father, an architect, worked for the United Nations in New York City so I spent my teenage years in Manhattan attending the United Nations International School, graduating in 1970.

While in high school, I attended the Arts Students League, followed by two years at Hunter College (1970-72) before transferring to the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The Museum School at that time was affiliated with Tufts University, so I received a BFA from them in 1974, as well as a Four Year Diploma from the Museum School. The following year I participated in their graduate program and was awarded a Fifth Year Graduate Certificate in Fine Arts and a Traveling Fellowship. In addition to my art degrees, I also hold a Masters of Education in Art Therapy from Leslie University, which I received in 1978.

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When I started college, I knew very little about painting, but at Hunter College I was fortunate to study with Ron Gorchov, Doug Ohlson, Robert Swain, and Samford Wurmfeld, who not only were amazing teachers but were also exhibiting artist that taught me by example. By the time I got to the Museum School in 1972, I was pouring, staining, and working very large on raw canvas, mostly creating atmospheric color field paintings that hinted of landscape. My work took a turn once I started teaching art in prisons, a job I had through my years of undergrad and graduate school in Boston. Always sensitive to environments, teaching in prisons changed my work and it began to deal with themes connected to place, borders, containment, and time – all themes very much present in my work today.

Diana González Gandolfi, *Rooms Of Their Own: 1958 Trujui*, pigmented wax with oil over encaustic collagraph mounted on panel, 40” x 60” x 2”, 2014. Trujui is the name of a suburb of Buenos Aires, the place I lived in the first nine years of my life before I left Argentina.

While at Hunter I also took my first printmaking classes, mostly learning intaglio and relief techniques, and I got hooked. I loved the process but I was not enamored of multiples or editions, so once I got to the Museum School, monoprinting became my medium of choice. Around this time, I started working in series and experimenting with layering and viscosity techniques, generating images that influenced and fed my paintings.

Where have you shown your work? Are you currently represented?

After graduate school I shared a studio in the Fort Point Channel area of Boston where I did mostly painting and started working with cold wax medium and oil for the first time. I also joined the Experimental Etching Studios in downtown Boston and began to print larger scale monotypes, which I started showing at Graphics I and Graphics 2, a gallery on Newbury Street. We began an exclusive relationship that lasted over 21 years, ending when the gallery closed after changing owners (and its name) several times.

By 1984, I was living and working in New Jersey, printing at Bob Blackburn’s Printmaking Workshop in Chelsea, painting out of a home studio, and showing in New York City at the Bess Cutler Gallery in Soho.

Through the years, I have been fortunate to have had numerous relationships with dealers and galleries representing my work including The Simon Gallery in Morristown, NJ; The Pringle Gallery in Old City, Philadelphia; the Cervini Haas Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona; Morpeth Contemporary in Hopewell, NJ, and J Cacciola*Gallery W in Bernardsville, NJ. Most of these galleries have closed so currently I have no gallery representation. Since I moved to Philadelphia in 2018, my focus has been on establishing myself in a new city and making my studio the sanctuary I need to create new work.

Diana González Gandolfi, *Trinity Of Memories: 2015 NYC*, pigmented wax, graphite, pigment stick and watercolor over encaustic collagraph mounted on panel, 40” x 132” x 2”, 2016.

Can you let us know what some of the recurring themes in your work are? How do they relate to your mark making or color choices?

My work has always been autobiographical, exploring themes connected to place, time, and memory among others. Using a symbolic vocabulary, I create sequential diaristic works that through the years have addressed a multiplicity of subjects from illness (*Linked Legacies Series* - 2009, *Prayer Beads Series* - 2012, and *Veins Of Time Series* 2013 - 15) to natural disasters (*The Flood Series* - 2012).

In the more recent series, I use map imagery of places I grew up as an

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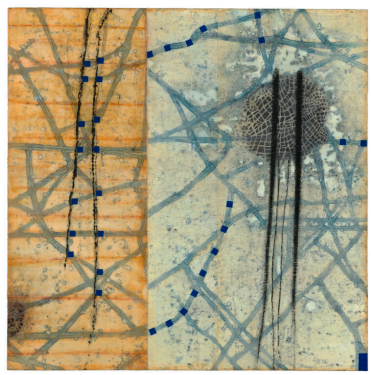
Virtual Demo: Encaustic Monotypes With Caryl St. Ama abstract concept to explore personal and universal narratives. The titles for these bodies of work explore the notion of identity and place, questioning the boundaries of space and the geography of expatriation. These series include: *Memory Terrains* (2014), *Djalan, Djalan* (2014 - 2016), *Navigated Territories* (2016 - to present), *Migratory Moves* (2014), *Contours and Webs* (2014), and *Between Traced Homelands* (2021).

The experience of geographic and temporal separation from the place I once called home is very central to my present work. I grew up in many countries and learned early on to make home wherever I found myself. My recent work specifically relates to these experiences of being uprooted and in transition, of moving from a known singular place to a layered world where multiple cultures and geographies compete and connect. It explores questions about migration, exile, and the tenuous meaning of home.



Diana González Gandolfi, *Passing Through: 2015 NJ To Seattle*, pigmented wax, graphite and pigment stick over encaustic collagraph mounted on panel, 40” x 40”, 2016.

In most of my work, color is an important player. After years of color theory in art school, I use color intuitively as a means of expressing emotion and to add visual weight to the work.

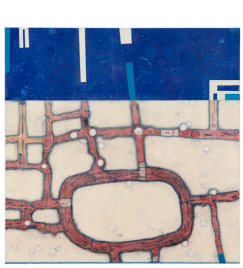
What is your process like? How do you start a new piece? Do you know where it is going or is the development of the work more organic?

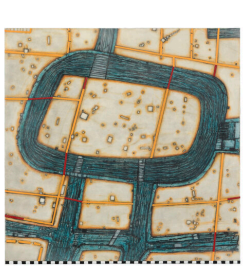
As a painter-printmaker that likes to work intuitively, I find that process is a fundamental part of my work. For the most part, the work is unplanned and meditative. I am always trying to find my voice in the materials I use to create it. I can’t separate the process from the meaning of the work because the process guides me to my imagery and leads me to the soul of each piece. Working with encaustic for the past 23 years has changed my process but the essence of the work, its focus, and my need to make it has remained the same.

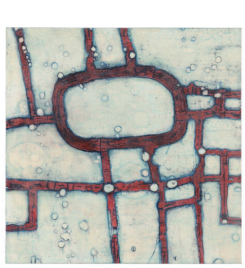
I have spent the last decade more engaged with printing than painting, focusing on learning new encaustic printmaking processes. Paula Roland introduced me to encaustic monotypes in 2005 and Elise Wagner and Dorothy Cochran taught me the encaustic collagraph process. My recent work is a hybrid of techniques and mediums, incorporating painting, drawing, and encaustic printmaking. The resulting works are symbolic of everything I have learned and done throughout the years.

All my work starts with a concept followed by decisions about size, medium, and substrate. Some ideas are best as small prints on paper, while others dictate larger scale, working on a rigid surface, layering images, or using more color. Since I began working with map imagery over ten years ago, my process has become more elaborate and layered and almost always begins with a printed image.

To start, I create a series of loose collagraph plates, print them in a range of colors, mount them to wood panels, and then begin to develop and rework the compositions with layers of watercolor, gouache, color pencils, graphite and pigmented wax. These printed, drawn, and painted layers are then sealed with encaustic medium and fused together to become one. I do not always know where the work will lead trusting the process and my intuition.







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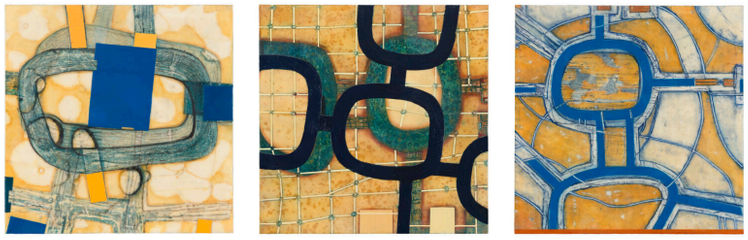


Diana González Gandolfi, *Round-About Grid*, pigmented wax, graphite, watercolor and pigment stick over encaustic collographs mounted on panel, 14” x 14” x 1 ¾” (each), 2016. This is a series of six mixed media works that reflect on the six trips I have made to Argentina since I left in 1961.

Each image depicts the political tempo at the time of each visit and it is dated accordingly. Top row - left to right: *Round-About #4: 1975 Buenos Aires*, *Round-About #5: 2004 Buenos Aires*, *Round-About #1: 1967 Buenos Aires*. Bottom row - left to right: *Round-About #3: 1971 Buenos Aires*, *Round-About #6: 2008 Buenos Aires*, *Round-About #2: 1969 Buenos Aires*.

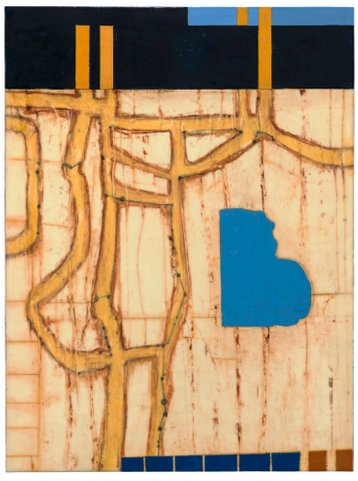
Is your studio at home or outside your home?

After 34 years of living in Central New Jersey and working out of a home studio, three years ago I moved to Philadelphia and now rent a space in a converted carpet factory building 8 miles from my Center City apartment. The studio space has plenty of storage and room to spread, but it has taken me a bit of time to find a new rhythm and to feel fully settled in. I am slowly adjusting to the commute and not being able to work late into the night, to the noises of others in the building and the blinding afternoon light.

During the initial months of the pandemic, getting to my studio was difficult and not safe so I worked from home, on our dinning room table, drawing and printing little works. After a year I am now back working and thinking in my studio, getting reacquainted with a series of works I started over a year ago and re-evaluating the direction I want them to go.

How do you come up with titles?

Earlier in my career, I had a love/hate relationship with titles finding them too suggestive of a narrative, so I numbered the work instead. Once my work became more autobiographical, titles followed. The titles in my work are often influenced and inspired by poetry, especially the poems of Pablo Neruda and Jorge Luis Borges, but also by the work of other writers and thinkers I like. For the recent cartographic works, the titles are inspired by memories of a location. Each title makes reference to a place, time, and relationship in my life.



Diana González Gandolfi, ATTUNED: 1964 BANDUNG, 2017, pigmented wax and pigment stick over monotype mounted on panel, 24 x 16 x 1 ¾ inches

Over the years I have amassed a collection of notebooks that contain phrases and bits and pieces of poems that have captured my imagination or I have connected to on some other level. When I am ready to title new work, this is the place I first go to, looking for those special words that may emotionally describe the work. Most often the work gets titled months after completion, after some distancing has occurred and I can look at it more objectively.

How many days a week do you work? Has your attitude toward painting/ art making shifted as you have gotten older? Do you feel more urgency or less?

Art is very personal for me and making it is a very ritualistic experience. I start most days reading and listening to news before going to the studio, a habit I inherited from my mother. This ritual feeds me with information that provides much material for my work. I like taking that knowledge and energy to my studio no matter where it is.

Under normal circumstances, I try to work in my studio daily, Monday through Friday, 7 to 8 hours, unless I have a deadline or an appointment. When in the studio, I try not to have too much around me to distract me and carve out time at home to do anything connected to the business of art.

As I have gotten older, my interest in art making has not wavered but this

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Encaustic: How To Store Your Paint year I have been struggling with some health issues that have affected how and when I work. I try to remain engaged and in the moment, open to other ways of doing things and establishing new routines. There is a feeling of wanting to be more productive, but lately, life has been so interrupted that at times it's hard to muster the physical energy needed to do the work.

Diana González Gandolfi, *Among The Luminaries: 1963 Bogota*, 2014, pigmented wax and oil over monotype mounted on panel, 24 x 24 x 2 inches.

Can you tell us a little bit about your piece in R&F's collection?

Suddenly Heard is typical of much of the work I was creating in the late 1990's. It is full of symbolic metaphorical images that depict the turbulence of an emotional moment. The split center image showing a tornado-like white shape on the right and the questioning dark image on the left makes references to a difficult period in my life where I was trying to balance motherhood and an art career. It is one of the first successful encaustic paintings I made and I am thrilled it is part of the R&F collection.

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