

Evolution Of Style, Imagination: Memphis Native's New Work Shows Her Transformation

By Andrea Lisle

The evolution in Maysey Craddock's work is astounding.

"Pieces of Sky," the Memphis-born artist's fifth show at David Lusk Gallery in 10 years, abandons the whimsy of her early work to distill emotion and spirituality in often simplistic gouache images.

Gone are the Dr. Seuss-like contraptions that danced across the canvas a decade ago, replaced by somber renderings of gnarled and twisted tree branches and continent-shaped blobs of paint.

There is more than meets the eye in her new work.

Craddock's tree images—"After the Surge," "The Moon is a Blanket for the Stars," "Sistine in the Fields," and "Intricate Terrain"—are painted on homemade canvases constructed from paper bags sewn together with silk threads. Without being heavy-handed, they speak to the ephemeral nature of life.



Like so many other contemporary artists, Craddock—a graduate of Tulane—has found inspiration in the recent devastation of New Orleans, deconstructing a ruined structure in Plaquemines Parish into geometric planes for the work "Plaquemine, Sharded House," also painted on a paper bag and then nailed to the pristine white wall of Lusk's East Memphis gallery.

A second room at Lusk is devoted to 26 smaller works, 3 ½ by 5 ½ inch collage paintings that use gouache, photographs, and found objects.

Here, Craddock's inspiration comes from the beer halls and mountain ranges of Bavaria, a place she visited often in recent years.

Zugspitze, the highest peak in Germany, shows up covered in red gouache, while in "Crossing the Middle Sea," two elegantly dressed women wander off a forest path.

Similarly, "Heroes in the Field" uses a photograph of a mustached sportsman for the backdrop, which is overlaid with a collaged photo of another man perched in a tree of Craddock's own creation. Craddock manipulates the original document of one person's memory into a statement of her own devising.

These works are literally and emotionally transformative, like postcards to an earlier self.