

Artist weaves 'Strand' from Nashville to Memphis

By Michelle Jones

Maysey Craddock has taken over the David Lusk Gallery here and in Memphis with her large-scale interpretations of Gulf Coast shoreline, cypress swamps and geological maps.

The paintings in "Strand" have poetic names like "Ghosts on the Water" and depict equally poetic scenes like the inky black and indigo image in that painting.

Landscapes in silhouette with lacy tree branches and mirror-image reflections fill Craddock's work, as do contemplations of negative and positive space.



Location and landscape

"It was my idea, with a little prodding," Craddock said of the split show. "It appealed to me because it made so much conceptual sense with where this work was heading. ... It was much more interesting to me to think about how these spaces would relate to one another."

The simultaneous shows are also a way of underscoring the connection between Nashville and Memphis. "The more of that we can do, the better for both cities," Lusk said. "Memphis keeps a chip on its shoulder and Nashville seems to think they have a lot going on right now, so we're able to stretch both of them."

Craddock spoke about preparing this body of work by phone from Memphis, where she and David Lusk were installing the second half of "Strand."

“I liked the idea of having I-40 as the strand connecting these two spaces,” she said. “It would be amazing to know if people are actually going to travel that space and visit both shows and see reflections in their memory of their experiences of the other space.”

The shows’ name has other meanings for Craddock: It’s German for beach or coast, which has obvious connections to her work; and it’s a reference to the thread she uses to connect her canvases.

About 80 percent of the imagery in “Strand” comes from a creek that leads into a Gulf Coast bay, Craddock said. Nashville “Strand” goes get a view of the creek in a video shown in the back of the gallery.

“I drove up the creek in a motorboat and managed to keep my camera steady, or as steady as I could, with where the reflection meets its maker, basically, at that center line,” Craddock said. An animator helped her configure the footage for vertical presentation.

“I wanted the land to seem like a spinning disk that was bouncing back and forth, spin towards you and then turn around and spin away, as if you’re standing straight on towards a wheel,” Craddock said.

This perspective applies to some of the paintings, as well. “the sea is a body in a thousand ways” is a silhouetted landscape turned on the vertical, its horizon now a y-axis.

Process and paper

Craddock works from her own photos, taking the images through a multistep process of subtracting details and collaging in other information as she draws the scenes.

“It’s a very low-tech, homemade printmaking technique,” she laughed.

Craddock included some of those source pictures for the first time in “Strand.” The images were printed on glass and mirrors, then Craddock added ink or spray paint “just to put a little soul into them.”

Glass and video are new materials for Craddock; her signature medium is used brown grocery bags she stitches together.

“It’s such a beautiful surface; it fits her subject matter so well,” Lusk said. “The closer you look at the work the more you get of the decisions she made in making (it).”

“They basically function as some kind of bridge between painting and sculpture,” Craddock said. She studied sculpting as an undergraduate, “so I’m very interested in materiality and working with my hands. That experience is part of the fabrication of these large canvases.

“There’s a terrain inherent in the folds of the paper that I really like,” she continued. “Sometimes I feel like I’m draping the imagery over the surfaces of the bags and it’s so appropriate for this show that the imagery is what the bags are made of — this forest connection, tree connection.”