

SEAGER / GRAY GALLERY

C O N T E M P O R A R Y F I N E A R T

108 Throckmorton Ave. Mill Valley 94941 . 415.384.8288 . seagergray.com . art@seagergray

pen-ti-men-to, pen(t)ə'men(t)ō/

noun

1. a visible trace of earlier painting beneath a layer or layers of paint on a canvas.

Why must art be static? You look at an abstraction, sculptured or painted, an entirely exciting arrangement of planes, spheres, nuclei, entirely without meaning. It would be perfect, but it is always still. The next step is motion.
Alexander Calder

Seager Gray Gallery presents *Pentimento*, an exhibition of interrelated mixed media works by Emily Payne from September 1 to September 30, 2018. A reception for the artist is 5:30 – 7:30 pm, Saturday, September 8. The exhibition includes a large work in progress entitled *Molting*, an unfinished installation that the artist will continue in the gallery allowing viewers to experience the creative process along the way. Payne will be in the gallery every Thursday from 11 to 3 and Saturdays, September 1st, 8th and 22nd.

Emily Payne creates a platform or “canvas” for her works by assembling vintage book boards to form a surface that has pattern, history and breaks the confines of the perfect rectangle. By using the covers as a platform for something new, she is able to hold onto the history and personal stories that the books contain while giving them a new purpose. Payne often traces the shadows of her own filigreed wire sculpture onto the work, creating an intriguing interplay between two and three-dimensions, light and shadow.

The title of the exhibition, *Pentimento* is echoed in the title of four paintings, one blue, one pink, one yellow and one green. Payne’s last show was very tonal - mostly in graphite and the brown natural shades of the vintage book covers and she was longing to bring in color. In each, with paint, she has again drawn the three-dimensional shape of one of her sculptures, leaving traces of an earlier impression - the pentimento - in the background. The effect gives the foreground image the illusion of moving forward in space. In the large blue work, *Pentimento 1*, by filling in all of the area on the outside of the sculpture to the edge of the canvas, she has been able to leave the patterned space between the wires in the lighter blue underpainting. The effect is satisfying, as though she has somehow managed to capture space itself on a two-dimensional surface in undulating pattern.

In April of this year, Emily Payne participated in the *Reimagine End of Life* conference, a San Francisco, city-wide event which explored big questions about life and death. By coincidence, the conference fell on the exact anniversary of her father’s near-drowning and death five days later, when she was ten. In dedication and remembrance of her father and his passing, she created an outdoor wall drawing entitled *Five Days*, a large installation included in this exhibition.

In the studio, she prepared six 3’ x 3’ canvases, made of cut-up vintage book boards. These boards were attached to wood backings that, when put together, formed a 6’ x 9’ movable wall which was transported to the San Francisco Senior Center at Aquatic Park, the sponsor of her project.

When Payne arrived to get started, she had a moment of panic. She had no idea what she was going to do. She went for a moment to the water’s edge to center herself and thought “Just get started. Start with something you know.” She had brought with her *Molt* a wire sculpture she had created beforehand. She secured the wire sculpture and began to draw

its shadow on the surface of the panels.

For those who experienced Payne's 2017 exhibition at Seager Gray, this is not a new concept. Payne worked throughout the exhibition drawing the shadows of a wire sculpture directly on the wall of the gallery allowing visitors to talk with her and experience the drawing as it progressed. In *Five Days*, however, Payne realized that the sun was always shifting and the shadow would move from one place to the other so she drew them as they moved, the lines of the sculpture appearing at different places upon the panel, depending on the time of day. This, along with the ever-changing pattern of waves on the shore of Aquatic Park where she was working and the theme of the project about growing older and the passage of time created a powerful metaphor, getting at a theme ever-present in her work. "We are constantly changing," said Payne, "hopefully molting, shedding old skins to allow for new growth. I don't want my work to be static."

There are three large works in the exhibition, *Five Days*, *First Flight* and *Molting*. *Molting* is the intentionally unfinished work that Payne will be continually work on during the course of the exhibition. *First Flight* came about when two panels she had assembled ended up being intriguing in and of themselves with their rhythm of blue panels, maps and bits of text. "I couldn't paint on it without disturbing that rhythm, so instead I drew the shadows of an earlier landscape-like sculpture I had made both in graphite and blue pencil." Payne was just about to leave for a month-long residency in Iceland and she felt that the piece with its maps and long linear feeling of distance marked a time in her life when her children were grown enough to allow her to explore her identity as an artist and to strip away all distractions.

And so, on the first of June of 2018, Payne took off to Reykjavík, Iceland for the month long international SÍM residency. With nothing but time in front her, she found that "the time opened up and spread out." She discovered that her own natural pace was very slow, much slower than her life generally demanded. The landscape matched the artist's temperament and love of process. Land formations were created from the combination of volcano and ice, happening over thousands of years. The slow-moving geological processes resulted in plateaued reaches of land and basalt hexagonal rock formations, their irregular patterns not entirely unlike the artist's patterned wire sculptures and variegated book panels. Several of the works in the exhibition were created in Iceland during her stay there including the *Fossil* and *Sediment* series with graphite on trace paper.

Payne loves the story about Alexander Calder who once showed up for an exhibition of his work at Harvard with only his luggage. When the folks at the museum asked him where the sculpture was, he took a roll of wire out of his pocket. "Right here," he said. He pulled his pliers out of the other pocket and proceeded to produce the whole show, on the spot. "I love that," said Payne. "It's not about the finished thing. It's about the process." It's not just the thing itself for Payne, but the space around it, the light, the shadow, the way it energizes the environment. By staying loose and open, "like that fluid state of a chrysalis when metamorphosis occurs," says Payne, "you somehow bring your own story to the process."

