

Art & Soul: Christine Sajecki's moody, dreamy 'American Villages' captures wild beauty

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By [Allison Hersh](#) for the Savannah Morning News

Last November, artist Christine Sajecki embarked on a cross-country road trip with her husband and their dog in tow.

While passing through Texas, New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona, Sajecki became captivated by America's open spaces, quiet landscapes and rural havens. She also found herself reflecting on how the western environment made her feel — on the most fundamental physical level — different.

"With all that air around me, I felt so viscerally the contrast of how close to each other we live, work, sleep and play on the East Coast," she explains. "How huge and varied our landscape is. How specific our lives and experience of America can be."

Although she visited the Grand Canyon and a host of national parks during her journey out West, what really captured Sajecki's attention was the desolate, uninhabited spaces between cities. For her, the nation's wild beauty can be glimpsed in this no-man's land, where sky and earth reign supreme.

"We cluster together near water, near ports and commerce, near trade and near others," she says. "We leave thousands of gorgeous miles of America uninhabited. I was fascinated by the spaces between villages, small homes in the middle of endless tracts."

In "American Villages," a new solo exhibit currently on display at 1704 Lincoln, Sajecki exhibits a series of large-format and small-format encaustic works inspired by her cross-country travels and by her experiences here in Savannah. Using local beeswax from Effingham County, clay from north Georgia, colored pigment and photocopy transfers, she creates a moody, dreamy series of images defined by a strong sense of place, color and emotion.

Sajecki's abstracted compositions map states of mind, exploring a range of emotions through a simple visual vocabulary. She skillfully documents the roadside blur glimpsed through a car window in "Side of the Road: Colorado," as cryptic hieroglyphs suggest the familiar outline billboards and wagon wheels.

A foggy evening drive through Texas inspired an encaustic masterpiece enlivened with saturated shades of aquamarine and sapphire that capture the dense quality of the air. A lone hacienda by the highway in New Mexico, sandwiched neatly between earth and sky, serves as the focus of one earth-toned composition. Even River Street in Savannah makes a cameo appearance in several works, including a trio of small-format port-inspired works featuring a waxy glaze atop pastel on recycled cotton paper.

These travel vignettes, inspired by journeys both near and far, reveal the artist's ongoing interest in strategic manipulations of space and time, as if the molten wax gently encases experience as it cools, like a fly in amber. By slowing down the eye as it scans each composition in "American Villages," Sajecki invites the viewer to revel in the vastness of the encaustic surface, with its rich colors and layered surfaces.

Sajecki is one of a handful of artists in coastal Georgia creating ambitious mixed media work from layers of molten wax and other materials. She originally discovered encaustic when she tried incorporating liquid wax into her paint to thicken it up and add more body.

"I started adding wax and eventually got rid of the oil paint altogether," she laughed. "The wax feels like it's really alive. You can keep changing things by heating it, scraping it and carving it. It's a tangible, malleable, sculptural process."

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Originally from Tolland, Conn., Christine Sajecki moved to Savannah in 1997 and earned a B.F.A. in Painting at the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2001. She works with a range of media, but is best known for her encaustic work. Her art has been included in juried and solo exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe.

IF YOU GO

What: "Christine Sajecki: American Villages"

When: Noon-6 p.m. Thursday-Friday and by appointment through June 1

Where: 1704Lincoln, 1704 Lincoln St.

Info: 912-398-1676, 1704lincoln.com