

INSPIRED BY MOTHER NATURE

TARA NOVAK FINDS BEAUTY IN GEOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

by LAURA LIEFF

BLATANT ACTS OF NATURE happen without warning and usually leave a mark — mostly as a reminder that no matter what anyone does or who they are, Mother Nature will prevail. The power of Mother Nature inspired local artist Tara Novak's most recent work — specifically satellite images of Earth that depict geological changes such as volcanic lava meeting the ocean, the aftermath of an avalanche or looking down to the deep rugged ocean floor.

"I've always been inspired by nature, but for this series, which is called 'EarthBound,' I focused on telling the story of Earth's processes and transformations," Novak explains. "I wanted to show what happens after storms tear through an area and how the landscape changes when a glacier shifts. I also wanted to depict human-caused disaster sites like the coal ash tailings that contaminate local streams and rivers. As destructive as the contamination is, those organic landscape changes can still be beautiful."

Novak's artistic process is as fascinating as her inspiration because she uses nontraditional materials. As she mixes clear



resin and hardener, and divides the liquid into cups to make a two-part epoxy mixture, she wears a mask and safety jumpsuit to protect herself from the chemicals. Next she adds mica powders — a ground-down natural stone found in the hillsides of the Vail Valley. With a variety of colors to choose from, the mica powders provide an extensive

color palette. She then uses various tools to spread out the mica-infused resin to create her organic designs.

"Texture is a big part of what I do," Novak explains. "Over the years, I've used many mediums like plasters and resins with my faux painting business and I like applying those skills, techniques and materials to my fine art."

The next step is getting her blowtorch ready, followed by a heat gun, all while being careful not to set her piece on fire. She explains that the blowtorch releases the air bubbles formed in the resin and then the heat gun manipulates the medium to achieve the desired design. Novak points out that the technique is similar to what she would use to create epoxy countertops.



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LONGTIME ARTIST + VAIL VALLEY RESIDENT

Crossing over skill sets is nothing new for Novak as she has spent the past 25 years building and expanding her thriving business, Custom Creations Inc., which she started in 1998. Working with contractors, interior designers and homeowners in Vail and Aspen, she provides artful solutions for decorative wall finishes, woodwork and antique furniture restoration, artistically hiding utility covers, and creating fine art commissions.

A former professional snowboarder and lifetime lover of the outdoors, Novak always looks to Mother Nature for inspiration. In 1993, she earned her degree in Packaging Design, with a minor in Graphic & Industrial Design from Rochester Institute of Technology, where she also pursued pottery, glass and photography. With her continued exploration of abstract painting and success showing in local galleries and commissioned awards, Novak also shows her work at



summer art festivals like Art on the Rockies, Colorado Art Shows and Eagle Arts ARTwalk, and through organizations like Vail Valley Art Guild.

As with most of her fine art, her current collection began with a specific inspiration but it changes as she works. “I don’t always know exactly what it’s going to look like,” she says. “I have an idea but sometimes it morphs as I go. Similar to nature, my work is transformative and I think that sets it apart.”

TOP: “Laze,” mica-infused resin and plaster on cradled hardboard, 48” x 30”.

LEFT: Tara Novak uses a blowtorch in her studio.

OPPOSITE: “Bigger Than Us 2,” Venetian plaster, gold leaf and reactive iron (rust) on canvas, 24” x 36”.

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