

Cynthia Fraula-Hahn

Phone: (540) 662-4355 Email:
cynthia@otherart.com

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[Assemblages of the Spirit Gallery](#)

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH: CYNTHIA L. FRAULA-HAHN

Cynthia Fraula-Hahn is an artist, arts activist and art historian based in Winchester. Her art has been featured nationally in solo and group exhibitions in New York City, Washington, D.C., Baltimore and Richmond. She has also exhibited in numerous educational institutions and galleries in Virginia and West Virginia. From 1994 to 1996 she was artist in residence at Kalani Honua in Paho, Hawaii, with one-person exhibits there in 1994 and 1996. Her professional achievements include an individual grant from The Puffin Foundation, Ltd.

Ms. Fraula-Hahn speaks frequently on women in the arts. She has been a speaker in the Women and the Arts Lecture series, Leesburg, Virginia, and a guest on public television and radio programs, including "Art Speak" (Public Broadcasting Service, Sterling, Virginia); "Crossroads" (WCTV, Winchester); "State of the Arts" (National Public Radio, Santa Cruz, California), and "Talk of the Town" (WHSV, Harrisonburg, Virginia). From 1999 to 2003 she served as a panelist on the Project and Organizational Grants panel of the Virginia Commission for the Arts.

In a career highlighted by arts activism, Ms. Fraula-Hahn has served on the Artist Directory committee of the Washington Project for the Arts; as a liaison between the Corcoran Museum of Art and Lord Fairfax Community College; and as a board member of the Lord Fairfax Community College Education Foundation. She has been featured in articles on the arts for The Winchester Star and the Northern Virginia Daily. In 2004 she contributed to the catalogue for the Korean and American International Exchange exhibition.

"Lot 24: The Wheelchair Project," a traveling exhibition organized by Ms. Fraula-Hahn in 2002, received an individual artist's grant from The Puffin Foundation in 2003. This issue-oriented exhibition contains studio paintings, collaborative paintings, sculpture and a

video performance piece by the artist. Shenandoah University hosted the premiere of "The Wheelchair Project" in 2002; subsequently it has traveled to the headquarters of the U.S. Social Security Administration, the Senate Russell Office Building, the Virginia General Assembly and VSA Arts of Richmond.

On Tuesday, March 7, 2006 at 7:30 p.m., Ms. Fraula-Hahn will present a public lecture on Mexican modernist artist Frida Kahlo at the Shenandoah University History and Tourism Center, 20 South Cameron Street, Winchester. The lecture will also include the opening of the exhibition, "Celebrating Women's History Month: The Art and Scholarship of Cynthia Fraula-Hahn and Helen Langa." Also on March 7, she will engage students on the SU main campus with a presentation and discussion on Italian 17th-century painter Artemisia Gentileschi. These talks will take place (in Gregory 152) from 9:30 to 10:45 a.m. and 11-12:15.

Ms. Fraula-Hahn received her MFA in painting and printmaking, as well as her BFA, from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. She also studied interior design at the University of Maryland in College Park. The lectures and exhibition celebrating her art and scholarship are generously supported by a gift from Virginia-Wojno Forney and the Shenandoah University Women's Studies program. All events are free and open to the public.

THOUGHTS ON MY JOURNEY:

First and foremost, I am a southern woman. I haven't always felt this way. I spent many years living several time zones away. In fact, I was sitting on the beach in San Diego when the south called me back. I was invited to attend a family reunion, and when I did, I became painfully aware of how quickly my parents were aging. I knew I had to grab the time I had left with them. I had to come home. Even so, when I took that last look at the Pacific Ocean and loaded my canvases into the U-Haul, it was all I could do to point the truck east.

I was born in Winchester, Virginia. It's claim to fame? Winchester changed hands more times than any other town during the civil war... 26, I think. And don't you forget it. I like that sense of contradiction. Indeed, it's always been an integral part of my work, not to mention my life.

Within a year of moving back, I married a guy I went to high school with, and shortly after that, my parents passed on. I was left in a daze, with a man I loved, an aching heart, and the family home and

surrounding peach orchard. For better or worse, I was home for good.

Spring painted the orchard pink while I sifted through boxes of photographs and family heirlooms. As I ran my fingers over the faces of my ancestors, I realized how deep my roots ran through this place. In my neck of the woods, you aren't a local unless your grandmother was born here. There was no denying it. I was as local as apple pie. How would the saturated colors I'd adopted during my years living and painting in the Virgin Islands express this deeply familiar, yet newly discovered place? How would the quality of light and surreal landscape translate from my canvases in California to my canvases here, amid the humid heat and apple orchards, the snowfall and the Blue Ridge Mountains? How would I incorporate this eccentric cast of characters: politicians and gamblers, orchardists and pioneers, bankers and embezzlers, Quakers all, into a new body of work, a regional body of work?

The answers have emerged in my most recent series, "Assemblages of the Spirit." It contains installations and assembled pieces that incorporate personal artifacts, letters, and photographs into the paintings themselves. Deeply personal, complex, playful and quirky, this work embodies every quality I bring to my painting: my love of intense color and rich surfaces, layer upon layer of paint; my love of nature and exotic landscape; my desire to work both large and small; even my sense of humor. Finally, in the way only someone who is both local and outsider can, I have used this body of work to express my sense of heritage -- beloved, messy, eccentric, seductive, unique.

It is the voice of my spirit. My hope is that it awakens in others the gifts that may lie buried in memory, waiting to be opened and cherished.

A LITTLE MORE ABOUT ME:

I got my Master's Degree in painting at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond in 1981. I was producing low relief, shaped paintings with a tropical theme. I became extremely interested in women artists and feminist art, as women were being sorely neglected in the art history books at the time. I spent two years documenting women artists and pioneered the opening of a women's slide section in the library that was made accessible to all art students.

I moved to the Virgin Islands where I continued to paint a large series

of lush, sensual, richly surfaced canvases that reflected the steamy surroundings and intense colors of the Caribbean.

While I lived in a house clinging to the cliffs above the Pacific Ocean in San Diego, I started a business designing hand-painted clothing called H.P.O. (Hand Painted Objects). The business was quite successful. Producing, marketing and selling took center stage.

Painting on canvas was a luxury, thus, banished to the wings.

After I returned to Winchester, I was the Executive Director of the Kurtz Cultural Center, as well as an alternative space, Rear Window Gallery. I serve as Liaison to the Corcoran Museum and School of Art and Design for a local college, and as a panelist for the Virginia Commission of the Arts. I have shown in many group shows, a large three person show in Baltimore's Metropol Gallery, as well as a one-woman show at Lord Fairfax Community College. In November, I will be launching a gallery space for Shenandoah University with my largest and most comprehensive one-woman show yet. I can't wait.

When my feet become too firmly planted on the ground, and my mind too deeply entrenched in local politics, my husband starts the engine of his Navajo Chieftain plane and we head for the sun.

A Review of Cynthia Fraula-Hahn's Work ... by Wendy Mayer

LA FRAULA - Brief Description of Her Work

A queen sits on her throne, the length of her train cascading down the stairs before her, a staff posting regally in her hand. Her clothes reflect the 1920's. They are frothy, and like those of the children seated around her, summer white. She could be the queen of a lawn party, idea, or daydream. The sky is textured in bright opal tones, blowy clouds defining it lightly, like lace.

This is a sweet scene, a peaceful scene, a peculiar scene. Behind this delicate monarch towers a giant apple, blood red and twice her size in every direction. Its vivid yellow highlights seem to emanate from her, pulsing rays into the surrounding greenery. She is the 1924 Apple Blossom Queen, and her smile gains power as you look at her, until it comes to seem knowing and slightly sinister. She brings the promise of growth and harvest, yet she conjures the dark power of fairy tales.

The adult standing to her side is dressed as an unlikely green bean, his velvet hat drooping lazily over one eye. He is the court jester, the secret teller. The neighborhood kids at the lower forefront of the canvas confront the viewer. Curious and suspicious, their eyes whisper, "Why have you come here? What do you want?"

Welcome to Cynthia Fraula-Hahn's South, a place filled with lushness, color, and tradition, just as it is with paradox, irony, and oddness. Her work lives in such

contradiction, combining saturated colors and elevated textures, where paint becomes a sculptural medium, with a wealth of eclectic influences, to express a point of view that is at once intuitive and experimental.

Her vision suggests transcendence, and indeed, her style is always evolving. Her imagery moves through the punchy, high-toned colors of the Caribbean, rich golden light of California, and deep watery blueness of Hawaii, gathering them all into the tapestry of her own regional history. Her brushwork interprets soulful landscapes, defined not by their familiarity, but by their otherworldliness. Organic and intimate, they are not quite known. Her composition flies high or zooms in for dense close-ups, flowers and foliage ever looming, ready to burst. Her personal gaze is spirit-filled, provocative and poignant but always reverent, revealing her subjects with humor and grace.

This is full moon awareness, or call it instead, a personal invitation to Cynthia's sizzling southern cocktail party, to be held at midnight in her strangely light-filled orchard. The music is bound to be Cuban, the place thick with eccentric relatives, impossible memories, and dry Martini's. You will find yourself there in the ripening peach trees, unaffected by the heat, dancing up a storm.

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