

Clare Hirn  
Artist Statement, 2023

Much of my painting focuses on bringing the beauty of the outside to our lives inside, translating the natural world onto canvas. It is always a challenge to capture a glimpse of our amazing three-dimensional, never static, world in two dimensions, and it is why I am attracted to detail as well as overall effect. I enjoy painting in a variety of styles, sizes, and mediums.

My artistic influences have largely been figurative painters, starting with the great masters of the Renaissance and their respect of form and space. Like artists of the past, I also often utilize an under drawing in the process of making my art. Significantly, I find this method carries the inherent energy in a drawing through to the surface of a painting. It plays an active role in the finished piece that may constitute many, many layers. Egg tempera, one of the earliest painting mediums, and one I still revisit, utilizes the under drawing. Whereas egg tempera is traditionally over ink, I have developed a technique to use graphite, charcoal, and on occasion other mediums for an under drawing. In larger works, a charcoal under drawing, creates a foil for me to contrast opacities with transparencies. Thin layers of acrylic and then oil paint are applied over the charcoal or pencil, producing effects ranging from calming to bright and vivid. I use wax, sand, dirt, mica flakes, leaf metals, and more. It allows me to juxtapose textured surfaces with the thinnest of paint. Layering the paint also creates beautiful transparencies that let the painting “breathe”, opening the space where it is viewed. Importantly, I feel my paintings can exist in an ephemeral manner, while also providing the tiniest, intricate details. My hope is that this creates a surface and a composition that viewers can interact with and see something new each time they return, and perhaps capture a moment of connection they might find out in the real landscape. This takes on an urgency in today’s climate and by achieving an almost hyperrealism/magical realism in some areas of my paintings I wish for viewers to feel their own innate, communal grasp of our shared world. After all, we live together within finite spaces, inside and out.

Since 2017 I have continued to experiment with leaving canvases out in the environment, often on family-owned property in rural Kentucky. I work on site, often in charcoal or other drawing media safe for the environment. The canvas is then gently tied to the tree it is a portrait of, or positioned under rocks by the creek being used as inspiration for a painting. I revisit and work on site over 3-12 months before bringing the canvas into the studio to finish the “conversation”. Patterns of mildew, set-in dirt, or areas of decayed canvas, all contribute to the nature of the piece. I call these paintings the “Weathered Series”.

The human figure has also been coming back into my work after a long hiatus. Much of my earlier figurative work was inspired by mythological stories, often stemming from environmental themes, such as Gaia, the Earth Goddess. Recently my figures are responding more often to our self-created environmental crises in this Anthropocene era. As an artist active professionally for over 30 years, I am still a student, but perhaps with a more assured, perhaps even urgent, sense of direction.