

ST. HELENA STAR

St. Helena artist's paintings on exhibit in San Francisco
By Jesse Duarte | August 24, 2022



Artist Clare Kirkconnell working on *Torryne's Bouquet*, 2020

For many of us the pandemic has been a time of frustrating isolation, misery and mental stagnation.

For St. Helena artist Clare Kirkconnell, it's been liberating.

“As the world got more intense the last couple of years, I lightened up. That gave me a lot of freedom in the studio,” said Kirkconnell, whose paintings are on exhibit at San Francisco's Berggruen Gallery through Saturday, Aug. 27.

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When the pandemic began, Kirkconnell exchanged her morning visits to the health club for sunrise walks with her husband, Doug Barr. She was inspired by the sight of dewy spider webs and the general resilience of nature during difficult times.

“Bringing those (outdoor) experiences into the studio helped me stay mentally healthy,” Kirkconnell said. “It helped me realize that through thick and thin, nature is always beautiful. It prevails.”



Clare Kirkconnell, *Silk and Jewels*, 2022, beads, embroidery thread and oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches

She added texture to her spider web paintings by sewing glass beads onto the canvas. The beads mimic the way dewdrops catch the morning light, she said.

A few paintings are of particular interest to the Upvalley. One, which depicts a pile of pruned vines, has gotten a surprising number of compliments, Kirkconnell said.

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Clare Kirkconnell, *Pruning*, 2022, oil on canvas, 72 x 72 inches

“I thought, ‘Who’s going to be interested in a pile of sticks?’” she said. “But at the opening it got more positive comments about this painting than any of the others.”

Another painting features a burned hillside near Glass Mountain Road, not far from Kirkconnell’s studio. The trees are reduced to vertical sticks, but the green grass beneath them and the blue sky above point to the possibility of renewal.

Kirkconnell’s recent work is also influenced by several milestones in her life: her mother’s death, her son’s wedding in an intimate backyard ceremony, and the death of Gretchen Berggruen, the wife of gallerist John Berggruen.

“These paintings are like diary entries,” Kirkconnell said. “The sorrows and the joy — it’s all in the show.”

"Clare Kirkconnell: Inside Out" is Kirkconnell’s fifth show at Berggruen Gallery, which is at 10 Hawthorne St. in San Francisco. Go to berggruen.com for more information.

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