

San Diego CityBeat

# The sublime lands of Lynn Schuette

Local artist shows off the scenery of her mind at  
Bread & Salt

by Seth Combs

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*Lynn Schuette*

*Photo by Andrea Lopez-Villafaña*

The walls of Lynn Schuette's Encanto home and studio are nearly bare. This feels odd considering they are normally covered in her own paintings and art works. Most of them are gone now, picked up and transported over to Bread & Salt in Logan Heights to be installed for her upcoming solo exhibition. There is, however, in the top right corner of her living room wall, something that stands out.

"I just started collecting them and taking pictures of them," says Schuette, referring to the enlarged photos of crane flies, the large, mosquito-like insects that have been seemingly everywhere in San Diego as of late. Later, as we head downstairs to her studio, the carcasses of over a dozen crane flies are neatly assembled on a table waiting for their close-ups. Next to them are splotches made by dribbling candle wax onto the page. Schuette explains that the wax was from something she was developing as a tribute to the children who were dying in mass shootings.

"There's something about pouring out these memorial candles... I don't know if I'm going there with them, but the forms were so beautiful. That's how my process works."

On the surface, this window into Schuette's process would seem far removed from the work she's more well known for, which includes fantastical paintings of and inspired by nature. The works on display at Bread & Salt for Schuette's *Warpaint* exhibition—which opens on Saturday, April 13 from 6 to 9 p.m.—draws from a number of series she's worked on over the years beginning in 2012. These include her *Desierto Pintado*, *One Dozen Roses*, *Stream* and, most recently, *Stay Romantic*. The title of the exhibition comes from a

painting included in the latter. Despite the light-hearted names of the series, Schuette's says the work deals in heavier themes.

“[*Desierto Pintado*] were all times of day, weather conditions, no evidence of humans,” says Schuette. “So when I paint or start painting, or go through the process of painting, it takes me places that I don't know it's going to take me. That's the wonder of painting. I may start out really angry, but part of me takes it back into balance.”



*“Calentarse” from the Desierto Pintado series by Lynn Schuette*

*Images courtesy of the artist*

As with the words of Cormac McCarthy, one of Schuette's inspirations, there is a talismanic beauty in her landscapes. There is also an uneasy tension and elements of hypnotic surrealism in the

invariant and unearthly colors that seem to transcend typical topographical scenes. One can look at a painting such as “Warpaint” and be mesmerized by the undulating waves of color, but there’s also a sense of foreboding just underneath the surface. It’s almost as if the viewer is looking outside and beyond humanity; at nature in its purest, unadulterated form.

“Susan Anderson, who’s the curator and art historian at OMA [Oceanside Museum of Art], told me something about what I do that I didn’t exactly realize,” says Schuette, referring to a recent OMA show she participated, which focused on local Surrealist artists. “She calls me a Sublime painter. That I’m not really a Surrealist artist, but one of the Sublimes. And she’s right. I wouldn’t necessarily use that word, but I always balance things.”

Yes, it’s true that Schuette’s paintings may have something in common with 19th Century painters such as John Martin, Frederic Edwin Church and Caspar David Friedrich, but they also incorporate elements of Surrealism, Romanticism, Cotopaxi and even Luminism. The latter style emphasizes meticulous detail and the camouflaging of the brush strokes, and Schuette’s strokes work to create a dream-like world where everything is both highly detailed and effortlessly blended. Pieces such as “Know Your Enemy” and “Our Fault”—both from the *Stay Romantic* series—give the viewer the sense they’re looking at some naturally occurring phenomenon like the aurora borealis or a sunset at the Grand Canyon.

“I don’t normally use the Grand Canyon. It’s a little too grand for me,” says Schuette, laughing when asked if she uses pictures of

specific landscapes for inspiration. “I actually kind of like just rocks. I think in the [*Desierto Pintado*] description, I said I sometimes start with Ansel Adams photographs, because they’re black and white. I don’t want to use color. I want my own sense of color.”



*“La linea de sangre” from the Desierto Pintado series by Lynn Schuette*

And while an entire article could be devoted to the legacy of Lynn Schuette, we’re here to talk about *Warpaint*. One would be tempted to call the exhibition a retrospective of the last decade, but even that is understating the depth and meaning of this particular exhibition. When pressed if there are thematic elements that tie all the series together, or why she chose to name the exhibition after one particular painting (not to mention, the many double entendres found in such a title), Schuette plays it off. She’s a veteran at this point, and while

she'll certainly admit to still being a radical at heart, she thinks the meanings behind her paintings should be just like the art itself: mysterious and subjective, but always revelatory.

“The reaction that people have... you never know what people are going to think. Some people, it will scare the bejeebus out of them,” says Schuette. “Like, ‘Oh my god it’s so dark,’ while others will say it’s breathtakingly beautiful. That’s the range you get. And I love that.”