

Two generations

By Dawnell Smith | Posted: Wednesday, August 10, 2011 11:28 am

Fiber and glass, representation and abstraction, mother and daughter: Alice and Anne Gant create work from different media, different aesthetics, different generational perspectives, but their artistic paths meet at the point of memory.

Where Alice Gant uses reverse appliqué to make giant banners of imaginative narrative homage to heroes and nature's bounty, her daughter Anne uses hot glass to reflect on the shadow side of all that exists—the necessarily ephemeral nature of objects and living things, and the way each object, each person, each culture casts a ghost of itself behind it.

In her show "Long Time No See!" at the ConocoPhillips Gallery in Grant Hall at Alaska Pacific University (the title presumably a shout-out to old Alaska friends), Alice heralds the impact of historical figures on music, dreams, hope, and the way we perceive and protect the land. Pieces like "Come Angel Band" and "My Mother's Hero" rise from floor to ceiling, the borders loaded with text and ornamentation. Her piece "She Comforts Us with Silliness" shows mother goose in a hat whipping out a tea towel.

Her body of work includes smaller, equally adorned pieces like "Early Birding," a depiction of mother and child feeding mostly black birds, but the big pieces stand out for their audacity and grandeur. Traditional and direct in technique and approach, the work resonates appreciation and respect for nature, the early dreamers and explorers who made the land accessible, and the visionaries who wanted some it kept out of reach.

At the end of her artist statement she writes, "Long ago, Alaska's Saint Herman realized that Spruce Island could be a refuge for animals and people. It's a good tradition."

Her banners fall into that same category of tradition. They capture the enormity of figure and idea and story in the smallest of acts, the most simple of contexts.

Anne Gant's "Pyrographies" at the Carr Gottstein Gallery takes a more structurally removed approach to the past. First she sculpts hot glass into shapes and lines, and then she presses the still-hot glass into wet sheets of Arches rag paper, creating burns and cracks through the layers. The resulting prints produce maps of the heat, she says, or "burnt impressions" that mimic the blast shadows of atomic bombs, the singed paper from the destruction of the World Trade Center, and the shroud of Turin.

The resulting prints present detailed line drawings of the glass forms, sometimes cluttered and saturated on multiple sheets of paper as in "A Cautionary Tale of Great Abundance," and sometimes as elegant as holiday ornaments, as in "Spirit Chandelier."

In a piece like "Midden and Moraine," you first notice the brown burnt lines and shapes, and then the layers pulling apart, the hint of a secondary print underneath, holes burnt between layers, the pulling away of paper, the singed edges. The beauty of the outer image coupled

with its disintegration speaks to the duplicity of consciousness-the inevitable awareness that the heat of creativity and life produces both formal beauty, and decay and destruction.

Another piece, "Precarious," allows for ample white space and a sense of delicacy, but hot glass has clearly broken through the outer membrane toward the bottom of the canvas, the point at which everything above relies.

As Anne put it in her statement, she tries to find the beauty in the ruins.

Though quite dissimilar in nuance, texture, transparency and subject matter, Alice Gant's "Long Time No See!" and Anne Gant's "Pyrographies" present the past as communal memory- from the iconic and glorified pictorial narratives of Alice's banners to the brittle and frayed imprints of Anne's forms and heat.

"Long Time No See!" and "Pyrographies" continue through August 28 at the Alaska Pacific University galleries.