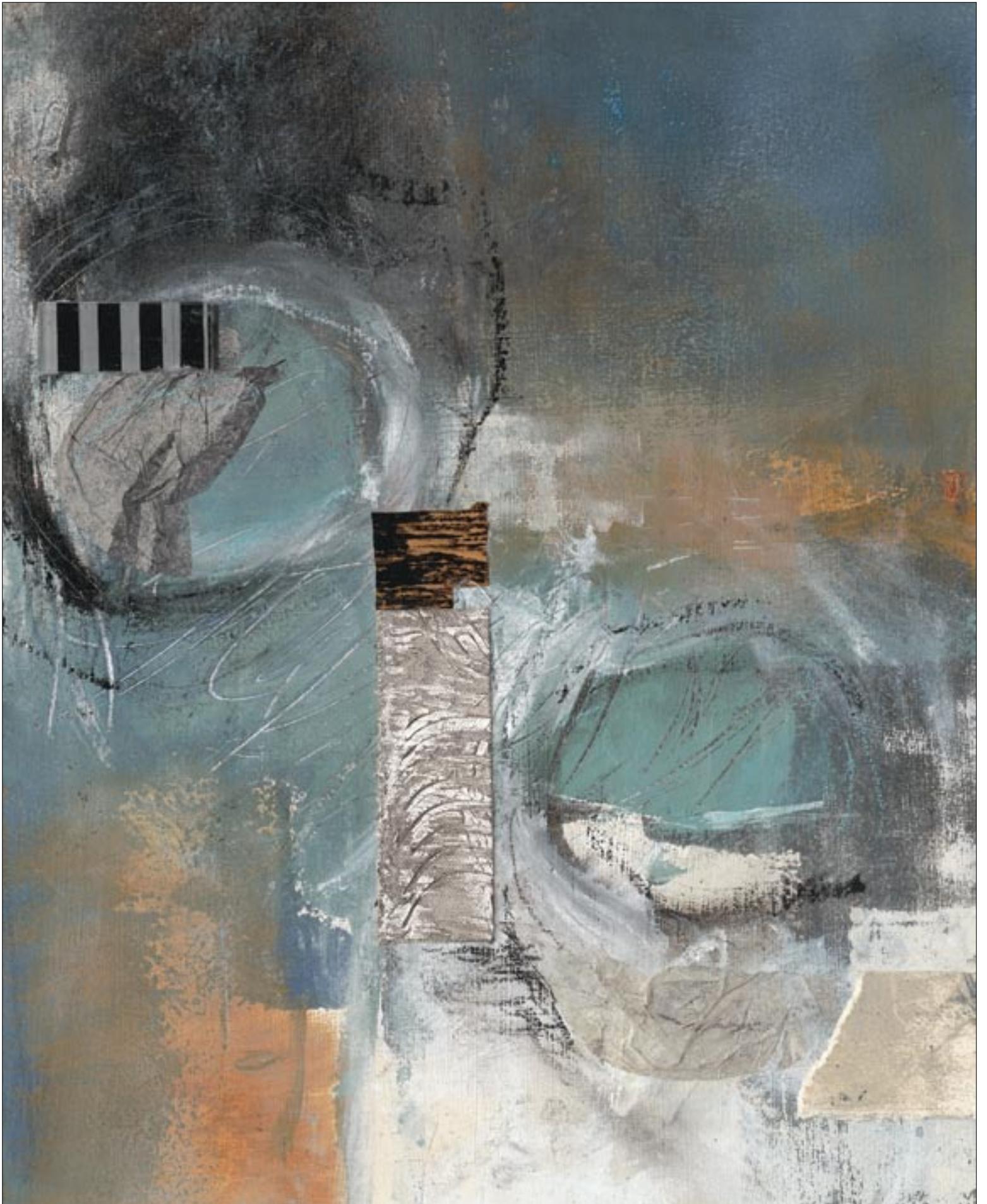




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CELEBRATING THE ARTS | MARCH 2019





ARTIST LAURIE FIELDS

# When Opposites Converge

COMBINING INTERESTING MATERIALS | BY DONNA CEDAR-SOUTHWORTH



Laurie Fields

A major turning point in the work of contemporary mixed media artist Laurie Fields occurred in an unlikely place: Home Depot. She was there studying a piece of cement board. It was “backer board,” used for tiling, and is scored with perfect square-inch vertical and horizontal lines or cubes. It is essentially a very precise grid, recessed into cement board, and the artist knew she had to have it.

Laurie brought the board back to her studio and started working with it. “I really liked the grid in it. I knew I wanted the piece to be ‘gritty.’ So I added brick mortar, glass tiles, a piece of vintage tin, a roofing shingle, embossed wallpaper and pieces of ceramic that I’d made over the years,” Laurie says. “It was the ‘coming together’ of a lot of different materials, and the first time I did it successfully. If you look, you can see the writing in it; it still says ‘backer.’” Laurie appropriately named her piece

“Matrix,” as she was both “bringing out and playing around with the grid,” says the artist, whose work is known for its texture and combination of interesting materials.

After that experience, there was no turning back. “Before that piece, I was doing more flat-surface, traditional work,” Laurie says. “It was more mixed media with handmade papers and airbrushed acrylic on canvas or paper.” Now, anything’s game, and more often than not she uses materials she finds not in art stores but in Home Depot.

The materials she uses are each little works of art in and of themselves and provide her with endless sources of inspiration as she sees the artistic possibility in materials that other artists often overlook: roofing shingles, Plexiglas, wood, tile, flashing, metal pieces sticks, leaves embedded with encaustic, clay and old



Painted canvases that she repurposes. A random piece of material catches her eye: a piece of tin, a twig, a roof tile, and she affixes it to a surface such as medium density fiber board or cement board; it becomes the focal point for her piece.

From there, it's an exploration in merging opposites. Says Laurie, "I'm intrigued by all kinds of materials and love to combine and integrate them into new, unexpected patterns. Bringing together opposites and creating new relationships and dynamics with them is satisfying," she says. "I love contrasting matte with gloss finishes, smooth with textured surfaces, and geometric images with free form images."

Laurie grew up in Yonkers, New York, and first became interested in art in high school, where she received encouragement from her teachers. After high school, she was accepted into the art school at the University of Hartford in Connecticut and graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1976. "It was an avant-garde art program," she says. "This was a post-abstract expressionism [era] and the emphasis was on conceptual art." She remembers as part of the admission process being given a set of words such as "and" and "but" from which to choose and then create a piece of art based on that idea. "It was challenging, unlike anything I'd ever done before," she says.

After graduation, Laurie took her fine art portfolio to the garment district in New York City in search of a job.



Page 22: "Protected 2," oil-mixed media, 22" x 17"

Page 23: "2 Branches," mixed media, 20" x 31"

This page, clockwise from top left: "Cool Spectrum C," oil-mixed media, 20" x 31"; "Cool Spectrum A," oil-mixed media, 20" x 31"; and "Sandstripe C," (detail), acrylic-mixed media, 30" x 15"

Opposite top: "Linear Leaves One Branch," mixed media, 21" x 27"; and "One Branch," mixed media, 31" x 18"



"I went to this one studio in Manhattan and the head of the studio saw something special in my work, even though I didn't have a textile portfolio," Laurie says. "She gave me a shot and worked with me."

Laurie caught on and had a successful run in textile design for three years, where she was introduced to airbrush, gouache and ruling pen. From that point she was making designs with cutout paper, creating and combining shapes and designs to be reproduced on fabric.

Laurie then applied for studio space in the Farmington Valley Arts Center in Avon, Connecticut. "It was always my dream to have a studio there, so when accepted, I moved to Connecticut and set up a studio," she says.

Laurie was still doing textiles at the time, but she was also painting in acrylic with airbrush on canvas. Her brother, who was attending the University of Maryland, told her about the Torpedo Factory. In 1980 she applied to the Alexandria art studios, was juried in 1981 and has been there ever since; it was there that she really engaged in mixed media and took it to new and unexpected levels.

"I love investigating new materials and seeing what I can get from them and what I can bring out of them," Laurie says. "I don't really have a preconceived notion of what I'm going to create when I start each piece—and if I do—after I put the first piece down, it's gone." é

Laurie Fields | [www.lauriefields.com](http://www.lauriefields.com)



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