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Now You See It, Now You Don't : Anne Diggory's hybrid media artwork at The Hyde

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Anne Diggory's 2014 piece *Elm Ascent*.

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the arts



Anne Diggory in her Saratoga Springs studio.

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In Saratoga Springs, a magnificent elm tree stretches into the sky behind the historic Algonquin Building. Artist Anne Diggory, who has lived in the city for more than 35 years, knows this old soldier and has painted it more than once. "There are only a few of these legacy elms left," she says.

This autumn, "Elm Ascent," an artwork inspired by that tree, will appear in "Hybrid Visions," a Diggory exhibit that opens Sept. 28 and runs through Jan. 4 at The Hyde Collection in Glens Falls.

But those who know Diggory's emotive Adirondack and Saratoga landscapes might be a bit surprised. These are not her traditional paintings. She calls these energetic, multi-layered works "hybrid media," and while they have been described as a blend of painting and photography, that's not quite right. "It's

really painting, photography and digital manipulation," Diggory says.

Viewers find the works tricky and fun. And they spend time looking at them. "Maybe you see it, now you don't. People are fascinated by it," she says. "They take the time because they are being asked to look carefully."

Diggory's hybrid work is "striking in its visual subtleties and sheer beauty," says Erin B. Coe, the Hyde's former chief curator.

"It challenges our expectation of the conventions that define landscape painting and places Anne in the context of other contemporary artists working with digital content," Coe says. "It also demonstrates how an artist whose work on the surface may appear steeped in tradition is in fact deeply engaged with the cultural landscape of the present

and the shifting modes of visibility that transcend both time and place."

Sixteen works, 13 on canvas and three on paper, will be shown in the Hoopes Gallery, including "Coming and Going," a nearly nine-foot-long installation that bends around a corner. Depicting places in Saratoga Springs, in the Adirondacks, Long Island and Alaska, each landscape began outdoors with a sketch, painting or photograph.

In Diggory's Greek Revival home on Circular Street, her studio inhabits half of the first floor, and a laptop computer, large monitor and Epson printer sit on a table a few feet away from her brushes and tubes of acrylic paint.

This summer, "Coming and Going" was her main hybrid project and it wrapped around a corner of the studio awaiting its final touches before travel-



Paintbrushes, tubes of paint and digital images in Anne Diggory's studio.

ing to the Hyde. “The opportunity for a solo show at the Hyde inspired me to create the corner piece specifically for that space,” she says.

Diggory started the work last summer, when she was an artist-in-residence at the Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake. With her easel at Buttermilk Falls, she recalls painting and watching the “rhythms of water and light, the patterns of light and trees,” and “the waterfall, where things are always falling apart.”

Back in the studio, using those smaller studies and Adobe Photoshop,

the painting got larger and was printed on canvas. Digital images were inserted, enhancing the detail, and then she painted some more.

Diggory is comfortable painting both large murals and small still lifes. In 2001, she climbed into the basket of a hydraulic crane to paint “The Flume,” a 23-foot-tall waterfall in a stairwell of the Adirondack Trust Company on Broadway. “What I like about big is that it really involves the viewer more. When you can’t see it all at once, you have to move your head.”

Water appears in all but two images in the Hyde show. “It’s my attempt to do the story of life,” says Diggory. “Water has that metaphor...the passage of life, the quiet pools and the turbulent pools.”

“Making Waves,” 36 by 48 inches on canvas, began with a photo of a red-striped beach towel spread on top of a large rock. A year after the scene caught her eye, Diggory decided to work with the image. “I did a large study, trying to figure out how it would fit in the space. Then I took a digital picture of that to take back to the lake to paint on. I spent three hours painting and scanned this into the computer with the photographs. So there are photographs of the people, the towel, the clouds and some of the reflection. I combined them and printed it, and did some more painting.”

While Diggory uses painting, photos and digital manipulation in each hybrid work, the process can happen in any order or combination. “To me, it’s the same as painting. You are just playing with visual details,” she says. “I can use it as another tool. I enjoy sometimes painting sections that look as if they are photographs to fool people. Like the towel on the rock. Half of that is photograph and half of it is paint, and you can’t really tell which is which.”

A smaller version of “Elm Ascent” was created last year for “What the Trees Say,” a Diggory exhibit at Spring Street Gallery for which the artist revisited parks, homes and other nooks in the city, looking for trees that she had painted decades ago.

“Anne has been painting Saratoga streets and yards for over 30 years,” says Gallery Director Maureen Sager. “She opened our eyes to the way a tree can frame a scene or exalt a building, how the natural and manmade elements play together, how delicate the balance is between them.”

While both her hybrid and traditional work is represented at Blue Mountain Gallery in Manhattan, Diggory remains deeply connected to Saratoga Springs and the Capital Region. “Seattle Slaw,” a horse sculpture she adorned with paintings of vegetables was a favorite in “Horses Saratoga Style” in 2002, the same year that Saratoga Arts presented the exhibit “Anne Diggory: Twenty-Five Years,” a mid-career retrospective.

Diggory's work has been juried into the prestigious Artists of the Mohawk-Hudson Region Exhibition, and when the Albany Institute of History & Art mounted its 2009-10 "Hudson River Panorama," she invited the public to join her in creating a river scene at the museum.

Diggory has been exploring hybrid media since 2006. "The first one was a happy accident. I was working on a painting up at the Paul Smiths VIC [Visitor Interpretive Center]. I came home with lots of photographs of different light on the water," she says.

On the computer, she moved those images on top of a photo of the painting. That was an 'aha!' moment," she says.

Twelve years later, hybrid media plays a major role in her work and has influenced her traditional painting. "There is a cross-fertilization between the hybrid work and the drawings and paintings," she says.

Diggory grew up as an "army brat," moving around the country, and even as a young girl, her teachers noticed her talent for drawing. As a teen, she headed to Yale University to study math, but in her twenties she ended up with a bachelor's degree in studio art and then a master's in fine art from the University of Indiana.

Anne and her husband, Terry, a retired Skidmore College professor, are the parents of two grown daughters: Ariel Lynch, who works for the Adirondack Park Agency, and Parker, a grad student at Atlanta's Emory University.

When she's not in her studio, Diggory loves to hike and canoe in the Adirondacks. In 2001, one of her hikes was chronicled in *The New York Times*, as a reporter climbed with her to the headwaters of the Hudson River near Mount Marcy, as she searched for a scene from a 1870s painting by Alexander Helwig Wyant.

This summer, she took her one-year-old granddaughter on her first canoe ride. "I enjoy being outdoors. In fact, what I miss when I'm at the computer is being out there," she says. **SL**

On Oct. 19, artist Anne Diggory will give a talk at The Hyde Collection about the Lake George paintings of 19th century artist John Frederick Kensett.

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