

Ilha Ardente **Ember Island**

Christine Arveil

I am extremely honoured to introduce Christine Arveil's Ember Island, a major project of the 2010 edition of the Boston Portuguese Festival.

Choosing an artist for the Festival was not an easy task, especially having arrived recently to my position, and also having available a myriad of rich and colourful possibilities, from many diverse areas of cultural creation which is related to Portugal. In this case, you may wonder why Christine, a French artist living in the United States, was chosen for this major exhibition at the Massachusetts State House.

First of all, her highly impressive and quality work concedes her the distinction of integrating this Festival dedicated to the celebration of the Portuguese Communities in Massachusetts.

Secondly, Christine represents the perfect bridge between the two sides of the Atlantic, a symbiosis of European and American cultures and a fresh interpretation of our cultural heritage and history, a new indulgence to our senses.

Like a bird crossing the Atlantic, Christine stopped in the Azores to regain strength and fell in love with the Islands, without knowing how to leave and how to overcome this addiction.

In her quest for an imaginary world filled of mythic strange characters, she lost herself in the crater of a volcano. In what became a never ending journey, she took some stones from the last eruption. By miracle they were still hot and telling a story from the future, the story of this exhibition.

Christine's paintings are testimonies of passion, stories of humans challenging gods, as if there were no limit to men's capabilities. They shine and reveal what is underneath, as the Chinese artists taught us centuries ago at the time of the first globalization.

Thirdly, Christine has a soul as immense as the universe, which captures the essence of the most profound places that exist in each and every person. She simultaneously reveals and hides, with the same intensity, the mysteries of the Ember Island, with passion and tranquillity. As if life were a song full of spiritual lyrics that you can only understand if your heart is open to others.

Perhaps this is a new dimension. Maybe we will get inebriated by the sweet and sour red grapes from the volcano. The light is so intense and the air so hot it burns our breath.

This should be one of the joys of living. We sincerely hope that Christine Arveil's Ember Island, a tribute to the Portuguese Community, will remain for ever in our collective memory.

May, 2010

Paulo Cunha Alves
Consul General of Portugal

É para mim uma grande honra apresentar-vos a Ilha Ardente, de Christine Arveil, um projecto maior da Edição de 2010 do Festival Português de Boston.

Selecionar um artista para o Festival não foi uma tarefa fácil, em especial por ter assumido funções há pouco tempo e por estar disponível um leque de opções ricas e coloridas, nas mais diversas áreas da criação cultural relacionada com Portugal. Assim, poderão questionar-se por que razão Christine Arveil, uma artista francesa residente nos EUA foi escolhida para esta exposição tão particular na Massachusetts State House.

Em primeiro lugar, julgo que o seu trabalho de qualidade e de elevado impacto lhe concede a distinção de integrar a agenda deste Festival dedicado à celebração das Comunidades Portuguesas de Massachusetts.

Por outro lado, Christine Arveil encarna a ponte ideal entre os dois lados do Atlântico, uma simbiose entre a cultura Europeia e a cultura Americana, e uma interpretação fresca da nossa herança cultural e histórica, uma nova indulgência para os sentidos.

Como um pássaro que atravessa o Oceano Atlântico, Christine deteve-se nos Açores para recuperar forças e apaixonou-se pelas Ilhas, sem saber como partir nem como ultrapassar esta dependência.

Na sua busca de um mundo imaginário, preenchido por personagens míticas e estranhas, perdeu-se na cratera de um vulcão. Naquilo que se tornou uma jornada sem fim, foi recolhendo algumas pedras da última erupção. Por milagre estas ainda estavam quentes e contavam uma história do futuro, a história desta exposição.

As pinturas de Christine Arveil são testemunhos de paixão, histórias de homens que desafiam deuses como se não existissem limites nas capacidades humanas. Elas brilham e revelam o que está por baixo, usando a mesma técnica que os chineses nos ensinaram séculos atrás no tempo da primeira globalização.

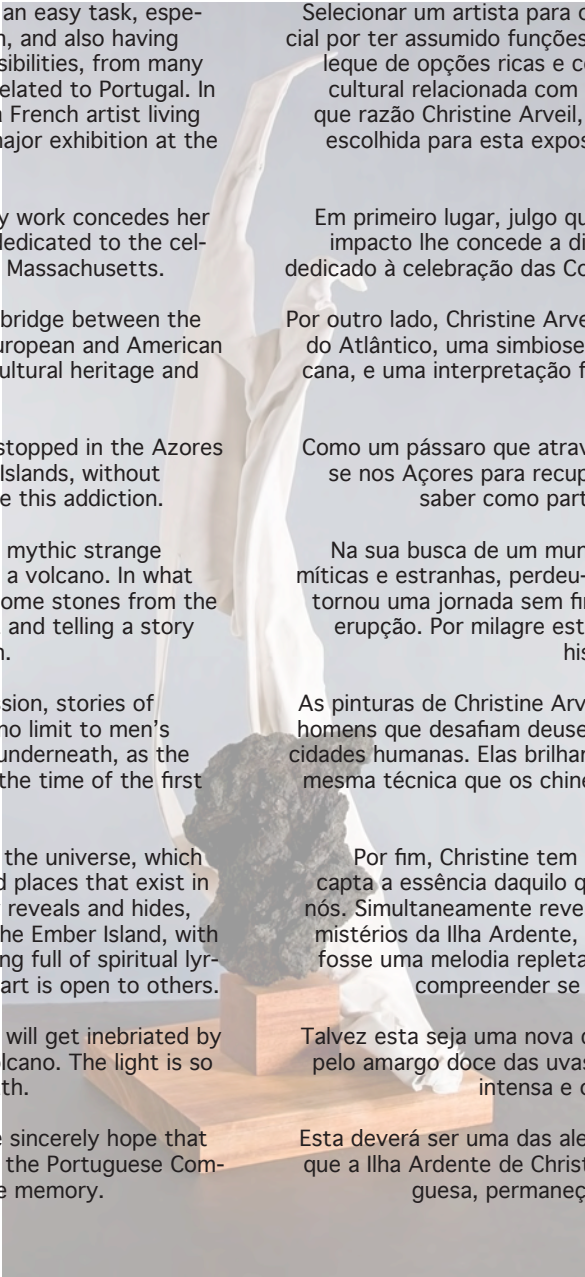
Por fim, Christine tem uma alma tão imensa como o universo, que capta a essência daquilo que de mais profundo existe em cada um de nós. Simultaneamente revela e esconde, com a mesma intensidade, os mistérios da Ilha Ardente, com paixão e tranquilidade. Como se a vida fosse uma melodia repleta de versos espirituais que apenas podemos compreender se o nosso coração estiver aberto aos outros.

Talvez esta seja uma nova dimensão. Quem sabe, ficaremos inebriados pelo amargo doce das uvas vermelhas nascidas do vulcão. A luz é tão intensa e o ar tão quente que nos inflama por dentro.

Esta deverá ser uma das alegrias de viver. Esperamos verdadeiramente que a Ilha Ardente de Christine Arveil, um tributo a Comunidade Portuguesa, permaneça para sempre na nossa memória colectiva.

Maio de 2010

Paulo Cunha Alves
Cónsul-Geral de Portugal



The Wave - basalt stone and 3-D canvas in gesso
Cover: Masquerade1 (detail) and stone drawing

Biography

Boston-based artist Christine Arveil has been integrating painting and writing in her creations for 30 years.

Born in Lyon, France in 1958, Christine Arveil became the first of her working-class family to enter university, graduating with a master's degree in Classics and French literature.

In 1979, she joined the studio of Luis Ansa, master of lacquer restoration and brush calligraphy in Paris. From Ansa she learnt ink-on-paper and lacquer-on-wood Oriental landscape painting.

She continued studying in Parisian lacquer studios, in particular with Isabelle Emmerique, while independently experimenting with early European painting formulas uncovered through archival research. This led her to write a monograph of Wattin, an artisan and author in 18th century France.

Her philosophical and technical quest for the founding grounds of painting developed beyond color. For two years, she restricted herself to using black ink, tracing single large words on white paper. Arveil's work was recognized in a first solo show: *A mots roseaux* (Paris, 1987) and at the 1987 Contemporary Calligraphy exhibition at the Japanese embassy.

After this ascetic period, she reverted to colors during her first American stay (1987-88), choosing dry pigments. Delving into the European roots of painting, she reproduced medieval manuscripts "illuminations" and their process of creation as a performance act. Experts attested the accuracy of these replicas, which were exhibited in the 1994 Centre Pompidou exhibition "Ecriture."

Questions of time and space in art creation led her to meet Arab calligraphers Abdallah Akar and Hassan Massoudy. They introduced her to a perception of space different from those found in Chinese and Occidental cultures. She deepened this understanding by working with Brahim Alaoui, Head Curator of Contemporary Art at the Arab World Institute in Paris (1993).

1992-95 were years of outreach to the international art community, leading art gatherings that brought together musicians and visual artists, ultimately initiating a festival in the Paris area (MBA, 1993). Fiction and non-fiction writing also took momentum, steadily occupying her early mornings, while painting remained nocturnal.

Arveil permanently moved to the United States in 1997. There, she integrated her life and artistic experiences into semi-abstract expressionist images for which she devised a unique painting technique and medium based on violin varnish. She joined the studio of Joseph Curtin, luthier and MacArthur Fellow, for immersing in the violin making world. Already experienced with lacquer and the documentation of finishes, she brought an original perspective. Her research has appeared in *The Strad*, a reference publication for classical music, on the BBC and in lectures at violin makers conventions.

In Boston since 2001, creation is her only focus, generating powerful images that are visionary, yet rooted in life experience. Technical mastery has freed her from conventional approaches to writing and painting. She has now authored fifty short stories, a novel, autobiographical texts, essays and poems, and has taught painting in museums in France and the United States.

In 2009, seventy pieces of *The Volcano Project* were installed for a six-week solo show in Portugal. This large scale ensemble - a novel, lacquer-on-wood red paintings, a stone-drawings series, sculptures and autobiographical materials- unites painting and writing in one strong entity reflecting on how the creative process arises.



Digital simulation of the Ember Island installation at the State House

ARVEIL STUDIO
Boston, Massachusetts
arveil.com

Though less serious in load-bearing emotional weight than her paintings, the drawings are serious in formal composition and execution, like Scarlatti sonatas to her symphonic scaled, tone poem paintings.

A delicate, steely discipline is at work in the drawings. No erasing or starting over. Decisions have to be made quickly: what to depict and what not to depict (because there is much to follow). Her disciplined daily regimen starts with writing, listening to music and text, moves to drawing, later on launching into a much more painstaking painting process: applying gesso to canvas followed by pigments into violin varnish application (drying, observing, sanding, reapplying). Over and over again.

In the drawings, there is first form and composition. Two dimensional, topographical mapping – Mercator made elegant! – of three-dimensional stone. Space becomes line, black stone becomes white space. All inverted, compressed and expanded simultaneously. Tiny “big bangs” captured and frozen in time.

As with the lava rocks that were the source, the drawings have their own specific gravity, in a dynamic balance. As proof, feel free to rotate 90 degrees or 180, and look anew. Up becomes down, but all still in balance. With poise and grace, full weight often safely rests on a single slender line. (Also, feel free to find figurative elements in the drawings. Christine would approve.)

In the paintings, a parallel but radically different process unfolds. Layers of pigment in varnish replace line, but which is front and which is recessed? Images emerge, but from where? Where there are multiple images they may appear isolated, but at the same time together, poignant but mysterious, and safely removed.

A deepening of space inward, or three-dimensional illusion? The struggle and search by the artist somehow renders the rock hard medium—one she has meticulously and obsessively explored – as deep, malleable and fluid, but at the same time as reflective as a mirror.

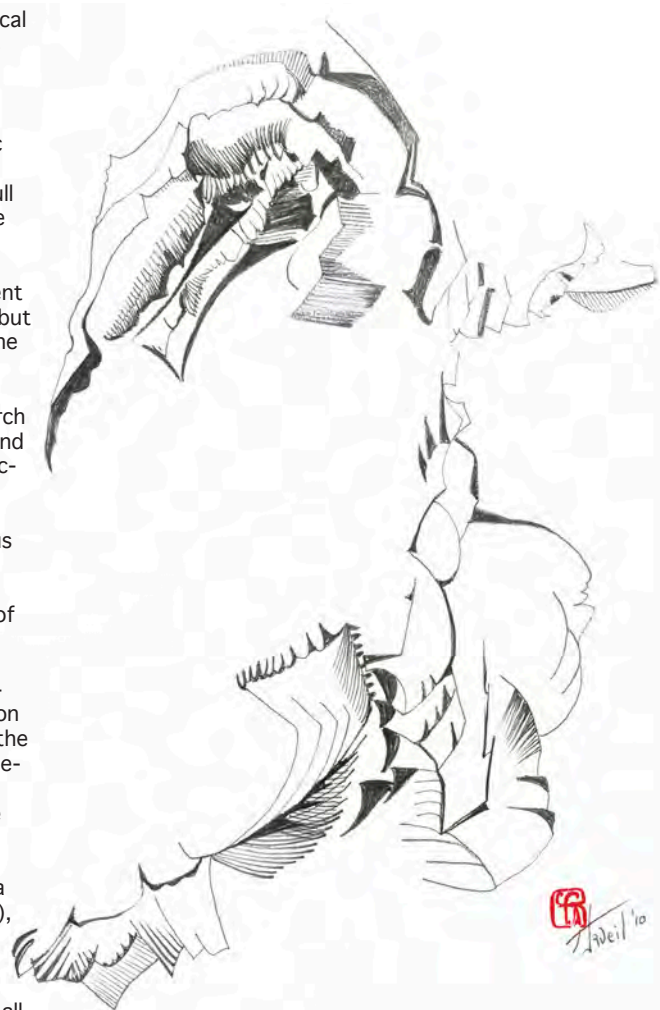
Color in Christine's paintings (a complex personal technique) is a far more rigorous mixing of pigments than appears on the surface, resulting in a palette of subtle, only seemingly monochromatic bases—(lava) red, whites that inhabit or blanket a fuller range of color, bits of rich blue or cobalt, pulling in an equally subtle range of emotional response.

Take white: I sense a sharp attack of it (a cutting away) in “Left Behind Masquerades I.” In “Noir c'est Noir” (black is black) where is the noir? Almost all is variation in white, with a divisional dribble of life-blood red and an attempt at blue light in the lower left. I find this white (with a suppressed overtone of pale green) more peaceful, less oppressive than the white in “To be young, violated, and bright,” where it seems to be encroaching, taking over, subjugating the figurative subject of the painting.

Christine's rare whites can be violent and cold, or calming and restful, promising a long sleep. Whites are never just white, reds never just red (or hot lava, or blood), and blacks, their symbolic opposite, may be white.

The stone drawings, the multi-dimensional layered, lacquered, violin-varnished paintings, and the sculptures, each so radically different upon initial examination, all revolve around the same sphere that is Christine's world. We bring our own specific gravity to bear on these works, and when we are pulled in, our own world resonates with just more depth and weight.

Jim McDonald
Executive Director, The Art Connection. Pianist.



Stone-drawing 2010



Georges - 48x48in, violin varnish and pigments over gesso on wood

Sob o Signo de Eros e Vulcano

Branco, vermelho, negro e ouro – raramente azul-francês ou azul-petróleo – cores dramáticas que instilam nestes trabalhos de pintura e de escultura uma profunda sensação de exotismo, de misticismo e sensualidade que cativa o olhar e apela a uma outra leitura mais atenta.

Nessa outra nova leitura de proximidade, entrando na pintura e no desenho ou rondando em torno das peças esculpidas e instaladas, o observador desperta para os vultos, os indícios, os organismos, figurinhas breves, apontamentos aplicados e recortados, outras vezes escorrimentos, empastamentos quando não o arrojado dos panos lançados que nas esculturas lembram leite derramado.

Esta vontade de trazer ao de cima sensações inusitadas radica no conhecimento primoroso das técnicas de aplicação de vernizes, goma-laca e folha de ouro, tanto quanto no conhecimento do valor metafórico da caligrafia aplicada às várias escritas e épocas.

A partir desta sabedoria ancestral, Chistine Arveil soube recriar um universo artístico muito próprio dominado pelas forças telúricas de impulso e atracção, forças bem presentes no imaginário das ilhas, o que justifica só por si a impressão que o Arquipélago dos Açores deixou na artista.

Para nós, insulares, *homens de todo o lugar e de nenhum, homens com o mar à porta* – como bem disse Nemésio –, este contraste de cores, o equilíbrio de forças, o arrojo, são expressão bem conhecida, expressão de um universo precário à beira do paraíso e do desastre, território à guarda de Eros e de Vulcano.

Analisada assim a obra artística de Chistine Arveil, torna-se mais perceptível a paixão que esta artista de origem francesa, residente nos EUA, sente por um certo Portugal atlântico, o das ilhas derivadas a meio do Oceano entre o Velho e o Novo Mundo, sítio mágico, prene de religiosidade, secreto e requintado na cristalização das vivências insulares.

Tendo visitado a exposição *The Volcano Project* que esteve patente ao público na Academia das Artes, em Ponta Delgada (Setembro, 2009), é para mim uma honra poder participar na abertura do catálogo da exposição *Ember Island*, inaugurada em Boston no dia em que se comemora a *Semana Portuguesa no Estado de Massachusetts*.

À autora, ao Núcleo Legislativo Luso-Americano da Massachusetts State House, ao Consulado Geral de Portugal em Boston, à Comunidade Portuguesa residente nessa outra margem, a todos apresento saudações e deixo uma palavra de amizade e de esperança, também em nome do Governo de Portugal.

Lisboa, 25 de Abril de 2010

A Ministra da Cultura, Gabriela Canavilhas



White, Red, Black and Gold – Rarely French blue or Teal – dramatic colours that imbue in these painting and sculpture pieces a deep sensation of exoticism, of mysticism and sensuality that captivates the eye and asks for a closer reading.

In this new proximity reading, while entering the paintings and drawings or prowling the carved and installed pieces, the observer awakens to the figures, the evidence, the organisms, brief figurines, cut and applied notes, sometimes drippings, impasto when not the dashing of rags thrown in the sculptures that resemble spilled milk.

Such desire to bring out unusual sensations lies within the exquisite knowledge of techniques for applying varnish, shellac and gold leaf, as well as in the knowledge of the metaphorical value of calligraphy applied to various writings and epochs.

Coming from this ancestral wisdom Christine Arveil knew how to recreate a very unique artistic universe dominated by the telluric forces of thrust and attraction, forces still present in the imaginary of the islands, which alone justifies the impression that the Azores Islands left on the artist.

For us, island dwellers, men from everywhere and nowhere, men with the sea at the door - as Nemésio said - this colour contrast, the balance of forces, the boldness, are well-known expression, expression of a precarious universe on the edge of paradise and disaster, territory at the custody of Eros and Vulcan.

Having analyzed the artwork of Christine Arveil, one notices the passion that this artist of French origin living in the USA feels for an Atlantic Portugal, the one of the derived islands in the middle of the Ocean between the Old and the New World, place of magic, pregnant with religiosity, secret and refined in the crystallization of the island experiences.

Having visited the exhibition The Volcano Project which was open to the public at the Academy of Arts in Ponta Delgada (September 2009), it is an honour to participate in the opening of the exhibition catalogue for Ember Island, premiering in Boston the day when the Portuguese Week is commemorated in the State of Massachusetts.

To the creator, the Luso-American Legislative Group of the Massachusetts State House, the Consulate General of Portugal in Boston, the Portuguese community living in that other shore, I send greetings to all present, as well as words of friendship and hope also on behalf of the Government of Portugal.





For weeks, we have heard of news of Iceland's volcano as it vented plumes of steam and ash, reminding us of the fragility of our world. Christine Arveil's painting and sculptures of The Volcano project could not be more timely and timeless. Inspired and driven by Saõ Miguel, Arveil pursued the power of place in its most elemental form, to explore memory and the passage of time. The strength of her dominant reds and oranges, sometimes pierced by white, presents nature as an explosive energy. Such an organic and powerful subject requires flowing forms, and color harmonies and disharmonies.

Christine's exquisite use of violin varnish creates subtle variety in her color that shimmers across painting surfaces. These works recall natural forms and natural phenomena at its most intense and mysterious. The drawings and sculptures, both of darkness and of light, lend poetic richness and depth to this exhibition.

Arveil captures the self-made disorder of fire and water and makes them metaphors for emotional states. She evokes perpetual movement and rhythm in a thunderous roar.

Rosemary Noon
Curator of the Carney Gallery at Regis College
Assistant Director of The Lowell Plan
Loeb Fellow at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University





Le courage d'un enfant - 48x48in, violin varnish and pigments over gesso on wood



So strongly has creativity driven your work, it has taken you through the intricate process of building a whole world. In many senses the novel you have written forms the foundation for the Volcano Project. I felt great privilege to be led by you into that world as you spoke the tale and underlying meanings in conversation as we drove to a seaside village. Indeed, the novel itself is all about finding the creative process by being with a volcano. Then, through your intimate connection within your imagination to the fictional main character, you were guided to the the volcanic outcropping into the sea in the Azores.

Your powerful imagination brings the essence of the volcano to life in ways that show us the essence as images, and speak the philosophy of Goethe. The paintings, large in a scale reflective of the enormity of the Volcano, illuminate its emotional qualities, revealing their form and breathing life into them.

The drawings from multitudes of perspectives of a singular volcanic rock, a piece of the whole, fully contain the essence of the Volcano. Through these precise drawings, made with concentrated discipline of time and materials, you have seen and held in your mind every detail of the volcanic rock. This, according to Goethe's philosophy, opens into the depth of insightful imagination able to perceive the true dynamic of coming-into-being. Goethe speaks of this as the portal to active marriage of human creativity and nature's creative process.

It was a great moment to enter the world of an artist of such strength of vision.

Martha S. Hill
Emeritus Social Sciences Researcher, University of Michigan

Boston Portuguese Festival 2010

www.bostonportuguese festival.org

Ember Island Ilha Ardente by Christine Arveil

June 1-11

at The Massachusetts State House, Doric Hall

Opening: June 1, 5pm

Guest Speaker: Rosemary Noon

An analysis of Christine Arveil's Volcano Project: 2005 - 2010



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design by Rodney Soares

Christine Arveil in Furnas, São Miguel, Azores