



THE VOLCANO PROJECT

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Part of the Arveil 5-year *Volcano Project*, this installation will display expressionist/abstract representations in rhythms of fiery red, organic black, and white with traces of blue.

The **Academia das Artes dos Açores** nestles a striking contemporary art center inside a former church building. Raw concrete alternates with old basalt pillars and white walls to carve out three distinct exhibition areas.



Stone drawing #17
Arveil, Dec. 2008

September 11 to October 17, 2009 Academia das Artes, São Miguel Açores, Portugal

Site-specific installation of 17 large square paintings created from violin varnish and pigments over wood, a series of 48 graphite drawings, and three self-standing three-dimensional works that incorporate lava stones.

Curator and Director of the Academia: Nina Medeiros, *Public relations:* Luna Telles Ribeiro

I first came to São Miguel in October 2007, following three years of writing my novel *La Faille / The Fault*. I explored the island, enough to fall in love with it, looking for its magnetic connection with the imaginary world that was becoming *The Volcano Project*.

When I returned in the Autumn of 2008, I had already created a set of paintings in red laquer using violin varnish as my medium, had drafted an art manifesto for the project, and was moving deeper into my own volcano, driven by the power of a vision rather than a mere artist fantasy.

My surrealist novel created the fictional character of a sculptor who isolates himself for several years inside a volcanic fault in search of the meaning of art creation, ultimately challenging his own strength. This character's pursuit engaged me more powerfully over time. It became a lead, a comfort, a presence in my steps. Aware of my mounting obsession, my husband, himself a musician resolved to find a place that would replicate the setting of my novel. One morning at sunrise, we drove to Ferraria.

I keep returning to Ferraria, at the end of Rua Ilha Sabrina—the disappeared island, with fascination. There, at the end of a winding road, lays a desolate field of volcanic stones and a hot spring surging into the sea water. At mid-tide, between rocks, one can bathe in secluded warm water while looking at wild ocean waves breaking close by. Early morning or after sunset, when lingering swimmers are gone, the area is back to complete isolation. The place keeps amazing me: it is stone for stone, wave for wave, the landscape that my novel had depicted.

For the last time, yesterday, I went to Ferraria, wandering about until sunset—in the same way that my character reaches his own volcanic place. The

reddening sun brushed a first set of beautiful shades over the sea and the cliffs. I bathed in the light for a while, then picked up my backpack to climb back to the village. I had hardly turned away when I felt a grasp on my neck forcing me to pivot: the sun seemed to have exploded, clinching my attention in its sudden heat. For a while, it felt like a game—each time I resolved to leave, thinking the fireworks were over—my eyes were pulled to a new area. New flashes, again and again: rocks turning green, mountain from saffron to wine, the night spreading then suddenly withdrawing, deep vermilion, cascades of turquoise. It was, that last evening, as if nature intensified its presence.

This wild volcanic field pouring into the sea merges with my vision and artwork in cumulating strengths. It is more than a metaphor: rather than merely describing a feeling or a concept, it engages a process of ongoing creation. Reality cranks in with my imagination to haul the water and whirl the wind of unsuspected energies. I have always wondered how degrees of personal intensity and life hardship play into art creation. One commonly hears that one who embraces art does not live at a "normal" pace. I believe that the creative process encompasses all human dimensions, at both the individual and the global scale; it reflects on their multiple fragments. At times, the intensity of the inner experience is such that only in finding an equal level of tension outside of one's self brings some feeling of balance. Some reach out to drugs or mysticism; I go to the sea and stones that once were lava and fire.

Ponta Delgada, October 2008



christine arveil

As a painter and writer for 30 years, Boston-based artist Christine Arveil has consistently pursued multiple paths of creation. Her archival research, expertise in Eastern and Western painting techniques, and intimate knowledge of musical instrument varnish restoration provide a powerful base for concentration into a singular artistic vision.

ARVEIL STUDIO

65 Winthrop Street
Charlestown, MA 02129, USA

TEL 001 617 241 0690

CEL 001 617 504 2668

arveil@mac.com

www.arveil.com

Born in 1958 in Lyon, Christine Arveil was the first in her working-class family to enter university, getting a master's degree in classics and French literature. She joined the studio of Luis Ansa, master of lacquer restoration and brush calligraphy in Paris in 1979. Ansa taught her ink-on-paper and lacquer-on-wood Chinese landscape painting. Christine Arveil was the only western artist invited to participate in the 1987 *Contemporary Calligraphy* exhibition at the Japanese embassy in France.

She worked in several studios over the following years while simultaneously testing early European painting formulas and techniques that she uncovered through archival research. Arveil's training in Eastern calligraphy combined with this historical research allowed her to reproduce medieval manuscript paintings and their process of creation. Experts affirmed the accuracy of her replicas, which were exhibited in the 1994 Centre Pompidou exhibition *Ecriture*.

Her quest for the essence of painting—technical and philosophical—soon led her to restrict her work to stone-ground black ink on paper and compose only with large deconstructed words. During this more ascetic period, she met contemporary Arab calligraphers Abdallah Akar and Hassan Masoudy, who introduced her to a new notion of space different from that found in Chinese art. She later worked with Brahim Alaoui, Head Curator of Contemporary Art at the Arab World Institute in Paris.

When Arveil returned to lacquer it was to semi-abstract expressionist images. At the same time, she studied violin varnishing with Joseph Curtin, luthier and 2005 MacArthur Fellow. Her experience with lacquer and knowledge of archival materials

relating to varnishes gave her an original perspective when approaching the challenge of restoring famous instruments. In 1997, Christine Arveil established her studio in the United States where she became a citizen.

Weaving words and painting into a composite media has always been core to Arveil's work. Whether through calligraphy or through her fiction writing, language is part of her medium. She is the author of fifty short stories, a novel, autobiographical texts, essays, and early poems.

Technical mastery has now freed her from conventional approaches to writing and painting. In 2009, she is mid-way through *The Volcano Project*: a new, large-scale body of work that unifies her painting with her writing. *The Volcano Project* builds a utopian entity while reflecting on the creative process of art. Whether painted or written, the images are visionary and yet rooted in life experience. Two bodies of work, a novel and a series of lacquer-on-wood red panels, create separate yet linked identities that the artist calls an experimental form of ubiquity.

Her research on varnishes has been published in *The Strad*, a journal for connoisseurs of string instruments, presented in a BBC interview and in lectures at international violin makers conventions. She has taught painting and calligraphy in museums in France and the United States and regularly exhibits her work in solo and group shows.

Boston, February 2009

REVIEWS

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But technique is not the point. The interiority of her painting is such that each one seems to have a moral life of its own.

—*Boston Globe*

She combines violin varnishes and pigments on wood to create haunting, expressive works, mainly abstract in organization, suggestive of themes and unheard melodies.

—*Art New England*

Painter of movement, Christine Arveil brings a new dimension to contemporary painting. Infused with Eastern traditions, she has succeeded through her dazzling mastery of varnishing techniques in creating inimitable compositions that wondrously reflect the secret world of passions and sentiments.

—Thierry Vankerk-Hoven, Consul General of France

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Pieranna Cavalchini, "Conversation at the Studio", Exhibition brochure for *Weight of Light*, Pub. Regis College, January 2005

... It is like a stone shining. I know what a painting conservator would say about such strong light. You're not going to find yourself in the same situation as many contemporary artists, with collectors calling you to ask if you can restore the work because the paint shifted or faded. So much contemporary work is ephemeral. Your works are going to stay the way they are for a long time.

Jennifer Lord, *Arts Entertainment, The Daily News*, "Opalescent art", January 23, 2005

The images in Christine Arveil's artwork float just beneath the surface, changing with the light or the position of the viewer.

... Arveil takes pride in using found objects for many of her pieces. In the center of the room, for example, is a log that naturally split in two. Fascinated with the natural puzzle, Arveil painted a vein of varnish spiked with gold... "I love the contradiction of using precious materials, this gold, over something that would be discarded otherwise".

... "I think it's so disappointing to have a painting," Arveil said. "You hang it on the wall, you're stuck with it for years. I wanted to make something that would change, that would keep surprising you."

Nick Shave, *The Strad*, "Double Acts", London, October 2007, Vol. 118 No 1410, p. 112

Christine Arveil - Benoit Rolland. An artist and a bow maker reveal a shared love of sculpture, silence and the sea.

... Besides being a painter, Christine has written a novel and around 50 short stories. She's knowledgeable not only about 18th-century varnishing techniques, but also about many painting techniques."

Alicia Faxon, *Arts New England*, "Christine Arveil: Weight of light", June-July 2005, Vol. 26, Issue 4, p. 35

As Walter Pater said, "All art aspires to the condition of music," and Christine Arveil's paintings exemplify this idea. She combines violin varnishes and pigments on wood to create haunting, expressive works, mainly abstract in organization, suggestive of themes and unheard melodies.

... In an abstract work such as *Fate* (2003) the artist captures a sense of dramatic movement, almost a crescendo or menacing leitmotiv. Some of the figurations are more benign, as in a figure with open arms in *I'll Be There For You*, but generally the tone is darker, as in the elements of *The Price of Freedom*. In this work the blood-red swirling mass seems to mirror warfare, wounds, and death. [...]

Jim Sullivan, *The Boston Globe*, *Go! Wednesday*, "Enjoyment of art", January 26, 2005

"I don't know about art, but I know what I like," the Cramps' *Lux Interior* once proudly sang. That's more or less *Go!*'s position on fine art. We're no experts, but we can point you to something we think you'll like. It's an exhibit called "Weight of Light" by French born abstract painter Christine Arveil.

... Arveil, who now lives in these parts, opened her first studio in Paris in 1984. Back then she was struck by the art of varnish and how it is integral to the creation of classical violins.

... But technique is not the point. The interiority of her painting is such that each one seems to have a moral life of its own. Music, truly, is connected to Arveil's art. "It's one of the things I try to translate into painting," she says. "Can we possibly visualize a complex prime emotion before it fits itself into a definite medium?" Renowned cellist Lynn Harrell wrote of Arveil's work that it was "a revelation of subtlety, color and translucence—magnificent and breathtaking."