

Art Review: Maysey Craddock's 'Strand' an earthy yet sublime meditation on transience

By Frederic Koepfel

To achieve serenity is no small thing. To come to terms with the complicated issues of life and deflect or distill them into works of art broadcasts the sense of tension and resolution to the wider world. And to convey that message in pieces of unsurpassed beauty and elegance seems an accomplishment to be as much envied as praised.

I am referring here to Maysey Craddock's exhibition "Strand," on view through Dec. 23 at David Lusk Gallery. A parallel show of the same name closes at David Lusk Gallery in Nashville on the same day.

For the first time since the artist returned to Memphis after Hurricane Katrina wreaked devastation on New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast in August 2005, Craddock's work does not contain images — overt or hinted at — of violence and destruction. We do not see in these pieces that manage to be both earthy and sublime the wreckage of the shores, the destruction of buildings, the moral, physical and psychic damage that characterized the horrendous climatic episode and the human folly that abetted it.



the light that traveled the shore
gouache and thread on found paper, 66x47"

Craddock's medium remains consistent. She employs gouache, a form of watercolor that is heavier, more opaque and chalkier than other watercolor mediums, and her surface consists of brown paper sacks unfolded and sewn

together with silk thread. Essential to her enterprise is the dichotomy between the humble and implied improvisational nature of this plane, which generally includes the logo of the manufacturer of the paper bags, and the meticulous, mysterious and romantic imagery of trees and rivers that she creates.

Every shoreline is permeable, a shifting arena of water, soil, roots, animals and human beings. In naming her exhibition “Strand,” the artist exploits a word with multiple nuances, from the shoreline itself to the notion of running aground or being stranded to the idea of threads being twisted together to form a single string. Thus the sense in these works of the seemingly solid yet so ephemeral, ever-shifting environment that characterizes both its material nature and our relationship with it. This aspect is seen most clearly in the series “drawn into a deeper shore” I through III, each approximately 48-by-64 inches, in which the transient barriers between water and land seem to beckon irresistibly to an enchanted though impermanent realm.

The exhibition’s iconic work is “the light that traveled the shore,” at 49-by-36.5 inches not the largest piece in the show but certainly the most magnetic. A pair of cypress trees stand side by side, not identical but familial, their bulbous roots wading in their own reflections in the still water of some backwater bayou. Majestic, totemic and anonymous, the trees partake of the sublimity of a grand forgetful solitude, resisting our impulse to make them into symbols of permanence even as the artist shapes them into something monumental.