

# Memory’s palette

BY ABBY LUBY  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Images, voices, and places are at the heart of unfurled memories, rolling out like a dream feeding our sense of self. It’s our memories that grab hold and affix to our psyche. Art prompted by memory by eight women artists are at the deeply satisfying exhibit “Voices: I Remember,” currently at the Hammond Museum. Curated by Bibiana Huang Matheis, the show draws on personal memory and inner reflection in a wide range of expressions. The artists are Eleni Smolen, George-Ann Gowan, Jill Parry, Kiyoko Sakai, Mimi Czajka Graminski , Tanya Kukucka, Tilly Strauss and Wennie Huang. “My Mother” by Jill Parry, featuring nine square paintings of her mother, Joyce Parry, are poignant, heartfelt moments of her mother six months before her passing in 2011. Parry recalls her mother visiting from Wales and going to the Hammond Museum years ago. The presentation of these paintings for the first time is seen as returning her mother’s essence to the museum. With a deft hand, Parry gives us a woman with eyes that hold a lifetime. Striking is Parry’s emotional strength in detailing her mother’s final fade-out, opening that unwelcome window on loss with a caring, loving hand. In her “Girl by the Sea” series, Eleni Smolen offers several variations on a theme in nine large paintings of a young girl holding a bird. The young girl is Smolen, and an old family photograph was the impetus for this series. Using



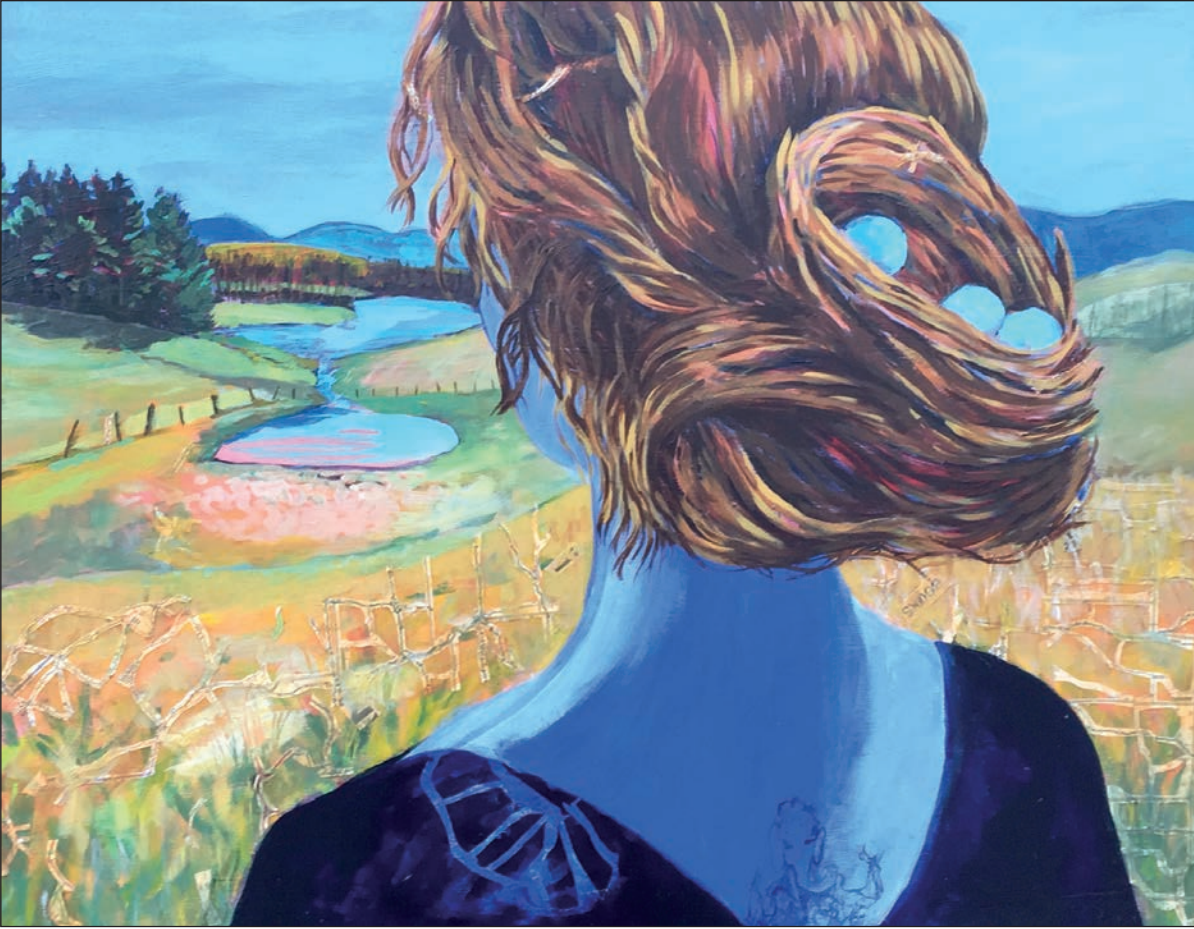
oils and ink on paper, threads and fabric, the constant of each image is the girl’s straightforward gaze. Everything else about her in each painting is physically and emotionally different; a briskly painted yellow girl holds a red bird against a roaring blue ocean; in another a gray lined figure stoically stares, the bird crooked in her arm. Modulating moods unfold on each canvas feeding a psychological spectrum of Smolen’s vision of her formative years. Memory is the springboard in the story paintings of Tilly Strauss, each pushing reality’s edge to embrace the ethereal. “Vanishing Woman,” has a shadowy woman cradling a dripping heart as she disappears amidst a flurry of bright, torn map pieces revealing sorrow for places lost while light falls on a frayed chair in the background. In “Nest Hair” a swirl of hair on the back of a woman’s head is spun into a bird’s nest replete with three blue eggs as she looks towards a distant verdant landscape. Lyrical and fun are works by Mimi Czajka Graminski who culls from childhood memories of her family sewing garments as she learned to stitch dresses for her dolls. Graminski taps into unbridled play using materials such as plastic mylar, monofilament, wire, foam, beeswax vinyl. In “Drawing on Memory” a dress cut from stiff black screening is buoyed by fanciful cruising balls and colorful swirls. The work of abstract expressionist Kiyoko Sakai conjures a youngster thrilled with nature, the cosmos and the feminine figure in 18 square foot panels. The tension in “Conversation,” is a springy dance of thickly painted figures and thin, buzzy lines. Sakai’s ability to lock us into her personal microcosms allows a free fall immersion to view all the panels as one multifaceted story. The blond, blue-eyed woman gazing

at you in paintings by Tanya Kukucka is redolent of traditional icon painting, but here she explicitly channels emotional and spiritual energy. In “The Soul Gatherers,” contrasting her coquettish white dress is a striking deep red cavity in her chest, the heavy symbolism carries to the bird she holds in one hand and a butterfly hovers over one finger in the other. Dreamy and surreal, we are taken on a quixotic departure from reality while grounded by her gaze that dares us to engage. George-Ann Gowan’s adept graphite drawing of five calla lilies has each evaporating into thin air to stunningly evoke the ebbs and flows of memory, and people coming and going in the span of a lifetime. Another Gowan work “Things Unknown,” is a three-dimensional mixed media piece of a young girl figurine with a leg broken off, sharing the space with a large white egg in a bird cage; the word fragile lies beside a pair of white gloves, evoking a myriad of meanings. “Paper Daughter” by mixed media artist Wennie Huang are 81 wood panels showing feet, muted, subdued, labeled ‘friend,’ ‘teacher’ or ‘daughter,’ relationships that stir Huang’s Chinese American heritage. The work imbues the collective memory of diasporic movements, contemplating feet as the key element of transport by people seeking new destinies and different realities. “Voices: I Remember” captures a multitude of expressions, each intoning the seed of memory from the past that comes to fruition in the present and freely casts creative imagination of what might be.

*Voices: I Remember will be displayed through November 2021 at Hammond Museum & Japanese Stroll Garden, 28 Deveau Road, North Salem.*



“Drawing on Memories” by Mimi Czajka Graminski



“Home” by Tilly Strauss



“My Mother” is a series of nine paintings by Jill Parry



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HAMMON MUSEUM  
“Conversation” by Kiyoko Sakai