

Powerless to Powerful



Encaustic Paintings of Women's Protest
by Julia Dzikiewicz

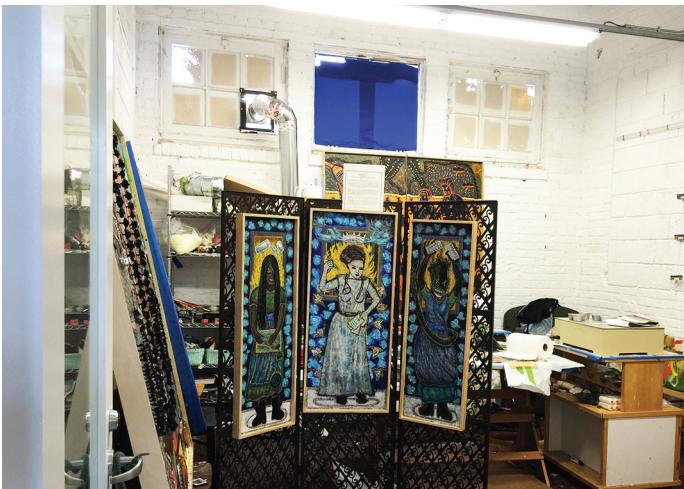
The Workhouse Arts Center



The Workhouse Arts Center, Lorton, Virginia



inside Building 5, my studio to the right



My studio

I enjoy painting the political. I was raised by a mother who ran political campaigns for fun, including her own for delegate of Virginia. She marched for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970's and worked to help pass legislation to help the poor. My Mom, Cindy Bandjunis, instilled in me a desire to learn about political issues and to paint about them.

This opportunity to paint Feminist work arrived in 2009 when I moved into my first artist's studio at the Workhouse Arts Center, formally known as the Lorton Prison and the Occoquan Workhouse. This new space was also ideal for exploring my new medium of encaustic.

As I organized my studio, I heard tour groups walk by, and our resident historian told stories of imprisoned women and unjust arrests.. I learned how over a hundred women had been imprisoned here in 1917 for picketing at the White House. I was shocked both by the brutality used against the Suffragists, and by my complete lack of knowledge of these events.

Books such as "Jailed for Freedom" by Doris Stevens, "A Women's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot" by Mary Walton, and "The Feminist Promise: 1972 to the Present" by Christine Stansell helped me understand the time and the events.

Angry and inspired, I began my Feminism Series. Early paintings tell the stories of a few of the leaders in the Suffrage movement. Later works feature modern women who are advancing women's rights today.

And The Occoquan Prison

In 1917, from June to December, police arrested Suffragists who were picketing in front of the White House for bogus charges, such as “obstructing the sidewalk”. They were then thrown into a “paddy wagon” and driven to the Occoquan Workhouse in Lorton Virginia.

Although the prison had been built in 1910 with the goal of reforming prisoners with tasks such as working on a farm, a different attitude was given to these new prisoners.

Superintendent Whittaker strived to make the Suffragists experience so horrible that no women would take a chance of coming back. The women were served inedible food, forced into ill fitting shoes and clothed in dresses unwashed after a year of use.

Moreover, in the famous “Night of Terror”, prison guards manhandled the women, tossed them in to metal beds, handcuffed their leader into a stress position, deprived all of them of sleep, and refused them access to lawyers or communication with the outside.

Handwritten notes about the conditions in the prison found their way to newspapers, such as the Washington Post. Attitudes about Suffrage changed as people read the stories of women who suffered there.

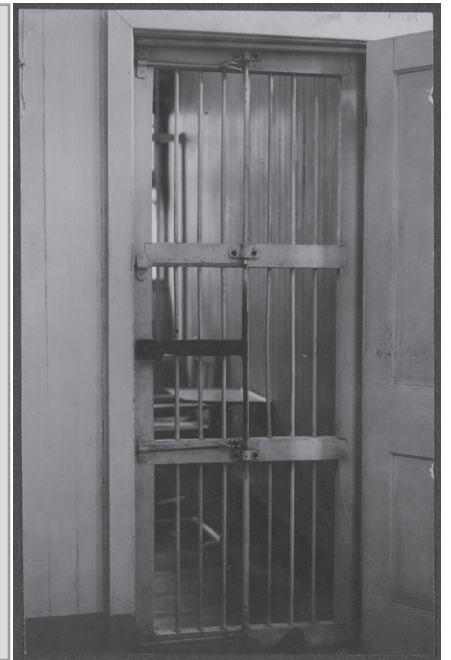
*The first picket line
- College day in the
picket line*

Photos from the Records of the National Women's Party, Manuscript Division
Library of Congress Washington, D.C.



*Cell at Occoquan [Workhouse], Underwood & Underwood, Washington, D.C. (Photographer)
[ca. 1917]*

Photos from the Records of the National Women's Party, Manuscript Division
Library of Congress Washington, D.C.



*Cell blocks at Occoquan [Workhouse], Harris & Ewing, Washington, D.C. (Photographer)
[ca. 1917]*

Photos from the Records of the National Women's Party, Manuscript Division
Library of Congress Washington, D.C.

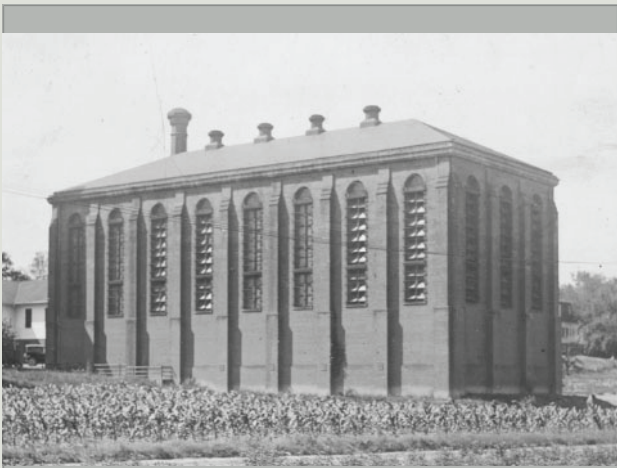




“The Story of the Ham”, encaustic with crystals, 60”x 60”, 2012

This painting is based on a true story I read in the book “Jailed for Freedom” by Doris Stevens. A warden in the District Prison (Washington Dc) countered a Suffragist’s hunger strike by hiring six chefs to cook ham night and day. The belief was that no hunger person could resist the smell of ham, and the suffragist was sure to break her fast.

The suffragist in the painting covers her nose to resist the smell. Three angels above her aide her by using video game characters (Angry Birds, Pac-man and Space Invaders), to blow up the floating ham slices. Giant pans of ham float in the background.



Abandoned jail near D.C. Prison where pickets of Aug. 18 were confined during long hunger strike. All returned to NWP Hdqtrs. in ambulances.

*[ca. 1917] Photos from the Records of the National Women's Party, Manuscript Division
Library of Congress Washington, D.C.*

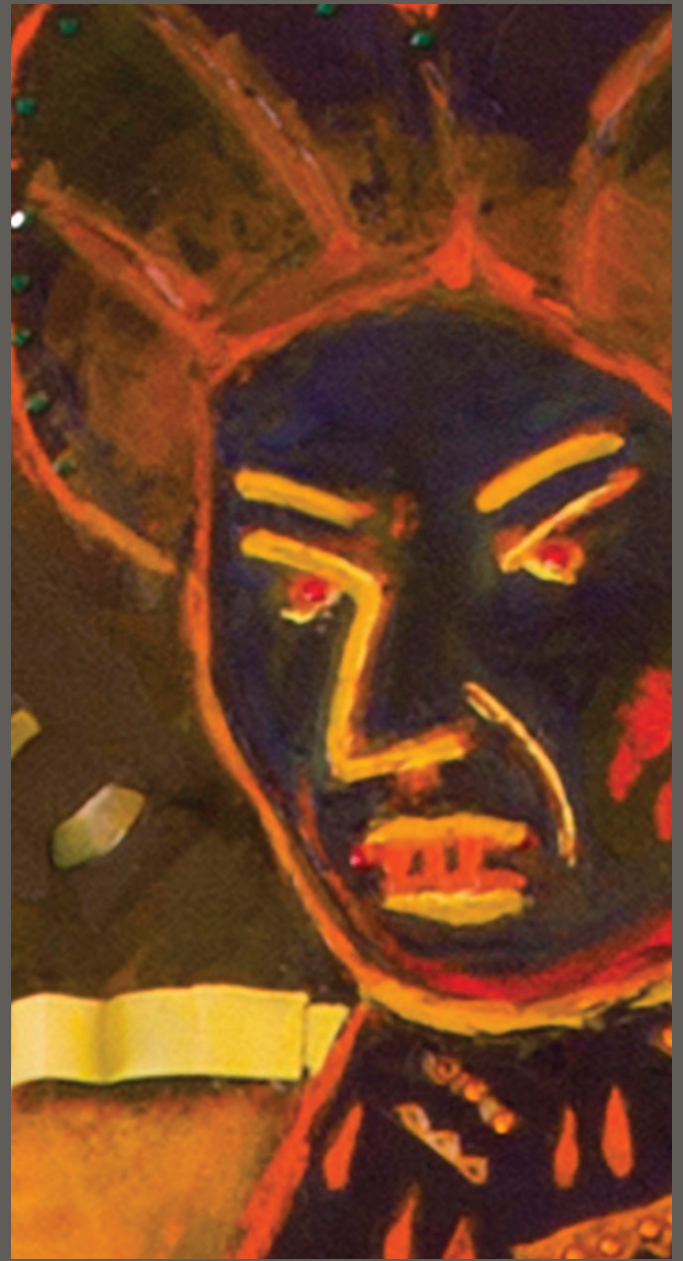




“Suffragist and Zombies”, 60”x60”, encaustic with crystals, 2012

A suffragist enters the Workhouse (known in 1917 as the Occoquan Prison in Lorton Virginia) and experiences an enforced shower, unsanitary conditions, and thoughtless violence.

Pictured with her is a Zombie matron, a Zombie prison dog (used by real prison guards to attack escaping prisoners) and a black female prisoner. The black prisoners were forced by prison guards to either serve the white women prisoners, or beat on the white women prisoners, depending on the mood of prison officials. Zombies represent a thoughtless society, one which tortures its protesters in prison and openly beats on women in front of the White House.



[Arrest of White House pickets Catherine Flanagan of Hartford, Connecticut (left), and Madeleine Watson of Chicago (right).] Harris & Ewing, 1917

[ca. 1917] Photos from the Records of the National Women's Party, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress Washington, D.C.





“Suffragists and Earthquakes” , 60”x60”, encaustic with vintage buttons, hanging glass crystals and crystals, 2012

On August 23, 2011, Virginia experienced an historic earthquake. This painting depicts the artist, as she paints in her home-studio, as the earthquake happens. The artist just happens to be painting a modern Suffragist, Sara Mahmoud Alsheif.

Sara Mahmoud Alsheif is an Egyptian woman and political activist who marched at Tiananmen Square for democracy and women suffrage. Ms. Alsheif also works as a journalist and Editor Manager in Egypt. She is 27 years old, at this time.

This painting was created in this series to show how modern women are still protesting to gain rights, and how they bravely march on, with the ever present possibility of violence.





“Malala and Maria”, encaustic with crystals, 60”x60”, 2013

This painting, “Malala and Maria” depicts two heroes. The first, Malala Yousafzai, is a Pakistani girl who is fighting for girls’ education. After The New York Times published her blog, the Taliban shot her in the head. Incredibly, she recovered, and still leads the way for child rights and education.

The rightmost figure depicts Maria Alvokhina, a punk rocker from Moscow, who was arrested and sentenced for singing protest songs with the group “Pussy Riot”. These protest songs were published to YouTube, resulting in an international following.

Both women are using new methods to advance their cause—Malala published a blog, and Maria and Pussy Riot’s music rang on YouTube.



“Malala Yousafzai at Girl Summit 2014” by Russell Watkins/ Department for International Development. - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/14714344864/>. Licensed under CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Malala_Yousafzai_at_Girl_Summit_2014.jpg#%2Fmedia/File:Malala_Yousafzai_at_Girl_Summit_2014.jpg

“Maria Alekhina (Pussy Riot) at the Moscow Tagansky District Court - Denis Bochkarev” by Denis Bochkarev - [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maria_Alekhina_\(Pussy_Riot\)_at_the_Moscow_Tagansky_District_Court_-_Denis_Bochkarev.jpg#%2Fmedia/File:Maria_Alekhina_\(Pussy_Riot\)_at_the_Moscow_Tagansky_District_Court_-_Denis_Bochkarev.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maria_Alekhina_(Pussy_Riot)_at_the_Moscow_Tagansky_District_Court_-_Denis_Bochkarev.jpg#%2Fmedia/File:Maria_Alekhina_(Pussy_Riot)_at_the_Moscow_Tagansky_District_Court_-_Denis_Bochkarev.jpg)





“Wendy and Hillary”, 60”x60”, encaustic with crystals, 2013

As I was painting my series on Suffrage/Feminism, I decided to depict modern women who have fought to advance women’s rights. Hillary Clinton and Wendy Davis came to mind. They are united by exhaustion in this painting, as Wendy Davis filibusters for eleven hours to block Senate Bill 5 and Hillary Clinton passes through an airport. I imagined Hillary Clinton on a moving walkway, ready to catch her next plane. This seemed an appropriate place for her. When she was Secretary of State, she travelled to one hundred and twelve countries, promoting women’s rights along the way.

I depict time passing in this picture though the lines of yellow flowers or suns which pass along the sky, mirroring new film making apps which use this type of graphic to depict the position of the sun in the sky.



“Wendy Davis in 2013” by Kevin Sutherland. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wendy_Davis_in_2013.jpeg#/media/File:Wendy_Davis_in_2013.jpeg



“Hillary Clinton official Secretary of State portrait crop” by United States Department of State - Official Photo at Department of State page. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hillary_Clinton_official_Secretary_of_State_portrait_crop.jpg#/media/File:Hillary_Clinton_official_Secretary_of_State_portrait_crop.jpg



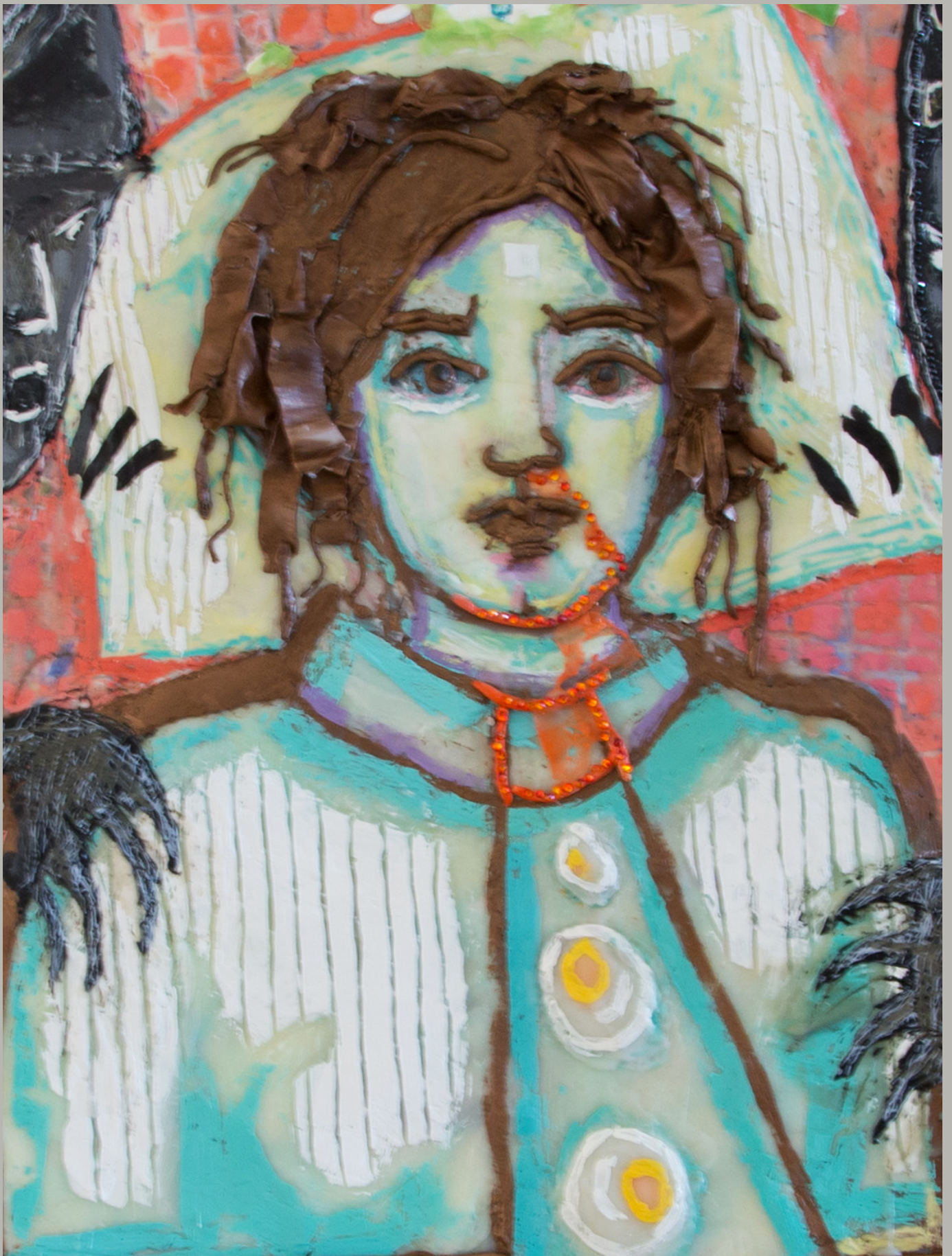


“Alice and Fear”, encaustic with vintage buttons, and crystals,, 2015

This painting was inspired by the courage of Alice Paul, who experienced force feeding in Britain, and then went on hunger strikes in America. At the District Prison, she was force fed twice a day a mixture of raw eggs and milk until her release.



Miss Alice Paul, New Jersey, National Chairman, Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage; Member, Ex-Officio, National Executive Committee, Woman's Party, contributed by Edmonston, Washington, D.c, 1915, Photos from the Records of the National Women's Party, Manuscript Division ,Library of Congress Washington, D.C.





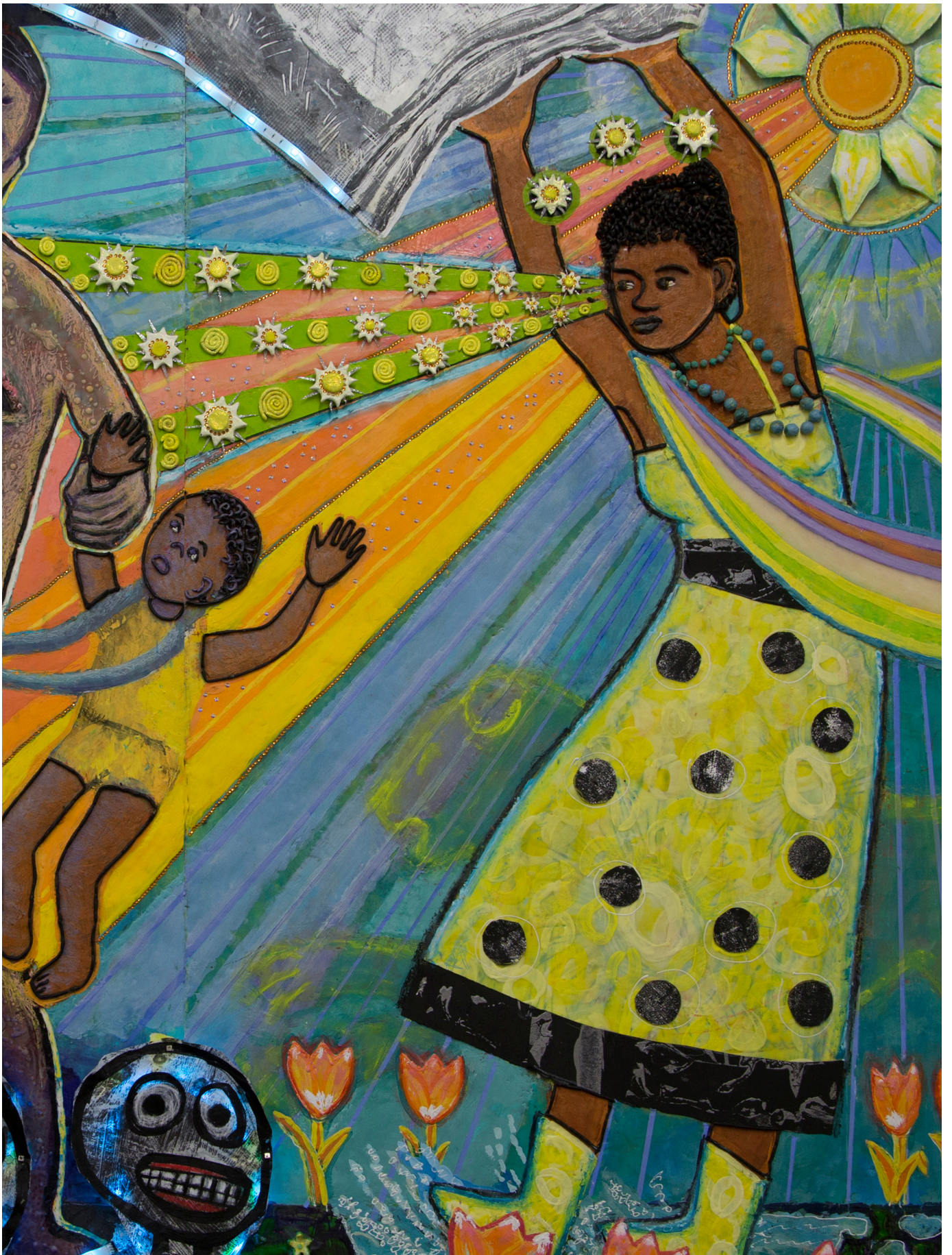
“Ida Wells”, encaustic with Swarovski crystals, 60”x 60”, encaustic printed paper and electric strip lights, 2016

In the painting “Ida Wells,” a woman pulls off a Klu Klux Klan robe to reveal the monster underneath. By seeing the monster clearly, she is able to defeat the creature, who is preparing to lynch a young boy. Lights accentuate the outside of the robe and lights shine under the three paper effigies on the bottom of the work.

Ida Wells was a suffragette, newspaper editor, civil rights activist, and reporter. She researched cases of lynching in the south and found racism to be the motivating cause. She gave speeches decrying this practice both in the USA and Europe. Ms. Wells also risked her life to write and publish anti-lynching articles.



public domain image by Mary Garrity





“Old Film, New Film”, 60”x 60,” encaustic with strip lights, encaustic printed paper, and Swarovski crystals, 2016

“Old Film, New Film” contrasts the past with the present. On the left side of the image, we see the oppressive past on an old silver movie screen. A black and white movie is playing. On the left, we see a woman trapped in a box. In the middle, a shark police officer threatens. The Frankenstein monster, inspired by the 1910 film, attacks.

On the right side of the painting is the happy present. A large woman holds a flower. Inside the flower is a movie playing inside a theatre. Golden curtains frame the screen as a woman places her ballot in a voting box. Inside the large figure are three modern people making a movie. The left-most woman is writing the script, the middle woman holds a sound boom, and a man uses a modern cell phone camera to create a video. These three contradict society’s messages of the 1900’s. A woman wears pants, another woman has a scientist/museum work badge, and the fellow appreciates flowers.

