

# Wax Works

*Provincetown's Marc Kundmann masters flame and molten wax to create his works of art*



*Summer Colony*, encaustic wax, charcoal, and oil on birch panel



*Almost Isolation*, encaustic wax, charcoal, and oil on birch panel

**M**arc Kundmann is bent over his newest piece of artwork, a color explosion of turquoise and pink, carefully wielding a flame. Most artists would shudder at the idea of taking a blowtorch to their work, but for Provincetown's Kundmann it is all part of his method.

Kundmann, a former graphic designer, is an encaustic wax artist who works with molten material to create his artwork. While the wax medium may be experiencing a revival, encaustic art has been around for centuries.

"The Greeks originally used wax to seal their boats and then realized it could be mixed with pigments to create colorful fleets," says Kundmann, peering into a pot of simmering wax in his studio

BY JESSICA LANIEWSKI

(Right) *Herring Cove Backwater*  
(Below) *Guarding Life*,  
encaustic wax,  
charcoal, and oil on  
two birch panels



ALISON CARON

Artist Marc Kundmann in his studio at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown

at the Fine Arts Work Center. “The Egyptians later adopted the use of colored wax from the Greeks and used it to paint their ornate sarcophagus masks.”

While Kundmann might not be painting for the same reason the Egyptians were, he is proud to be part of such a storied craft. Having studied the technique and history of encaustic wax, Kundmann finds inspiration in the work of Jasper Johns, an artist who reinvigorated the medium and incorporated mixed media collage in his work.

“I think of myself as a painter, but I happen to love this medium,” says Kundmann in his studio. “You just have to work quickly,” he adds with a smile. In addition to being trained as a graphic

designer, the Chicago native has been an avid oil painter for ten years, a technique that brought him to using cold wax and then the encaustic medium.

Kundmann approaches his custom-made birch wood panels with a piece of charcoal, but not always a finished idea of what he wants to portray. “I look at the wood grain as a basis and sometimes I take inspiration from that,” he says running his hands over a small square birch panel. A resident of Provincetown for the past twelve years, he also finds inspiration in the beauty of his surroundings. In most of Kundmann’s artwork there is a whisper of Provincetown in the background as an iconic cottage or the Monument hovering



Kundmann uses the blowtorch to constantly heat and reheat the wax.

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## artist profile

on the horizon.

When the refined white beeswax is finally boiling on his hotplate, Kundmann carefully pours equal measures of the molten medium into small cans. A dollop of rich red oil paint is mixed into one cup of wax and a bright



*Water Baubles*, encaustic wax, charcoal, and oil on birch panel

turquoise oil stick makes a blue-green pool in another. Despite having to constantly ventilate his studio regardless of the weather, Kundmann admires the easy clean up of the wax and the simplicity of simply reheating the medium when he's ready to paint next time.

After his charcoal sketch has taken shape, Kundmann applies a layer of transparent wax for the base with a Japanese hake brush. A miniature blowtorch is used at this step because the wax, colorless or pigmented, has to be constantly kept hot. This heating process is another artistic element that enhances Kundmann's work. His use of the blowtorch affects the appearance of the piece; he can give it a refined look or heat it until it's edgy and the wax drips down the sides of the panels creating varying dimensions. "I love the layers you can create with encaustic," says Kundmann,



*Tight Coil*, encaustic wax, charcoal, and oil on birch panel

who has been working with hot wax for three years. The artist also uses a palette tool or knife to further create lines and

allow the layers to show through one another.

Kundmann, who shows his work at Addison Art Gallery in Orleans, is well known for his depictions of cottages and mysterious figures who are emotional-

ly impenetrable to the viewer. Kundmann likes that the viewer will never know what is happening inside the homes or the heads of his masculine forms.

Kundmann's approach to the work has evolved since he began working with encaustic wax. "Now, more than in the past, I let the paintings lead the way," he says gesturing to a new, multi panel piece. Recently, he has been pushing the boundaries of his work and experimenting with wood panels of varying sizes.



Kundmann paints with melted encaustic wax pigmented with oils

"I'm starting to explore more natural material now," admits Kundmann in front of a calm earthy piece of blues and greens. His newest pieces are part of an ongoing water series that is both suggestive

and part of a complete world for the artist. "I want to bridge the figurative and structural. I've been playing around with more of an organic world," he says as he drags a purple oil stick across a jagged pink and orange horizon.

Even after Kundmann reaches a finished point with his artwork, the wax medium allows him to return to a panel and enhance layers and create new dimensions. "With encaustic you can always rework the painting, it's infinitely renewable," he says excitedly. 🌻



*Playhouse*, encaustic wax, charcoal, and oil on birch panel

To learn more about Marc Kundmann, visit [www.marckundmann.com](http://www.marckundmann.com), or view a selection of his work at Addison Art Gallery at 43 Route 28 in Orleans.