

LADUE NEWS

By Bryan A. Hollerbach
Image courtesy of Judith Shaw

An almost daunting textural element pervades *Common Ground*, the work by Judith Shaw illustrated here, which graces a solo exhibition titled “fault lines” running at the St. Louis Artists’ Guild in Clayton from Friday, Aug. 14, through Sept. 12.

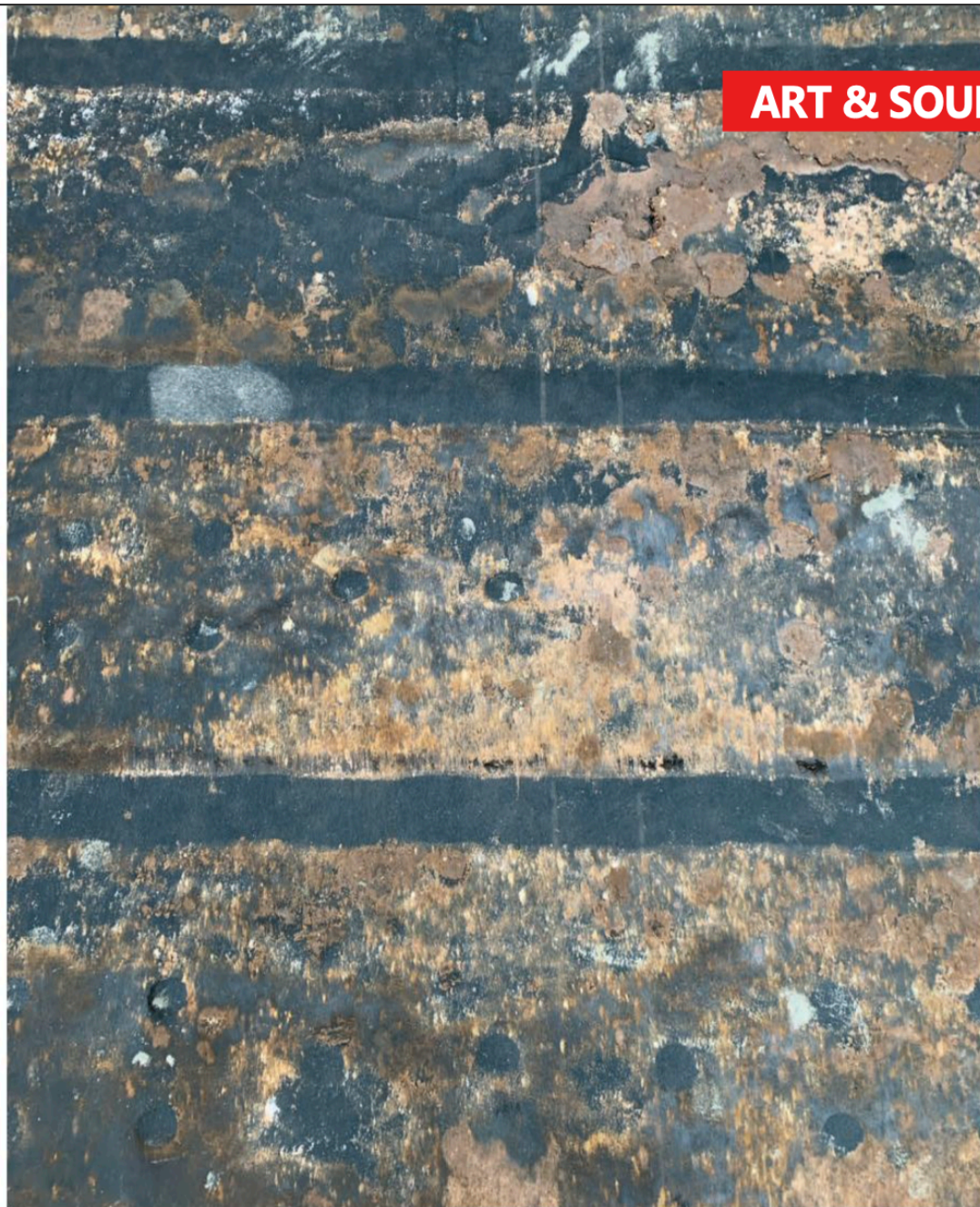
Common Ground practically demands an interaction between sight and touch. The creation of the 38- by 108-inch behemoth, Shaw relates, involved “an unpredictable convergence of circumstances and conditions involving men and machines on a sprawling construction project surrounding my home in Clayton. The site was the source of angst and anguish for years – until I found a way to turn it into art.”

Common Ground and related works in a yearlong project originated when, during a walk, Shaw “noticed tire tracks left on the pavement from the massive vehicles moving around the job site. I photographed the patterns and rhythmic designs, with a vision of capturing the imagery more vividly one day. I didn’t know *how* I would do this, but that didn’t stop me. ...

“After experimenting with different materials, I developed a method using tar paper as my backdrop. As soon as I saw how the marks embossed the black, gritty surface, I *knew* I’d hit upon my technique. As odd as it may seem, I *do* admit to having a fondness for tires. As a raw material, they’re earthy and gutsy and hold intense emotional and creative potential. ...”

Shaw continues with the background (at once absorbing and highly amusing) on *Common Ground*: “To test my latest idea, I went down to the construction site with rolls of tar paper tucked under my arms. I introduced myself to workers, explaining what I hoped to pull off.”

In particular, she credits an especially amiable flagman at the site named Taylor. “When there was a lull in the action,” Shaw says, “Taylor and I would confer to find



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opportune moments to pull a print. He signaled machine operators to drive over the paper after positioning it where I wanted on the tarmac. The interaction and results were *thrilling*.

“Seeing these strapping workers navigate their mammoth machines with sensitivity and focus was deeply moving. They truly became partners in the art, approaching my printmaking with the same care and attention they paid to their own trades. Many seemed to enjoy the

lighthearted break in routine. We grew to appreciate and admire the artistry in each others’ work.”

Shaw hails as gratifying “the spirit of collaboration, connection and camaraderie” of the project before concluding: “Through my eyes, the whole world becomes a sculptural tapestry and a medium for expressing the inexpressible. And through my artwork, I hope to instill a way of seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary.”

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Metro area artists who wish to be considered for future installments of this monthly department of Ladue News should email inquiries to bhollerbach@laduenews.com with “Art & Soul” in the subject line.