

Extinct animals live on in new Annapolis exhibit

Emily Campbell, The Examiner
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Annapolis -

The hand of man can kill or it can create.

Gail Hallow Watkins creates out of what has been killed.

The local artist, whose new exhibit is on display at the DeMatteis Gallery in Annapolis, creates mixed media paintings based on species that are now extinct.

The name of the exhibit, Status X, is based on the label that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designates for extinct animals.

“Each one of these animals has a story. That’s been the fascinating thing for me, how they went extinct and what happened,” Watkins said. “I chose animals that went extinct after the 1600s because I figure that’s when the hand of man created problems for these creatures.”

Watkins creates stencils of the animals from books or the Internet, then layers up to five sheets of comic strips on top of the stencils. She then paints on top or between the layers and sands the paint with an electric sander, creating an abstract painting.

The artist, who has been incorporating extinct animals into her work since 1998, has become somewhat of an expert on the subject.

She credits some of her inspiration to her daughter, who is a marine biologist, Watkins said, adding that she and her daughter are planning on working together on projects in the future.

Starting out with extinct species of fish, Watkins has moved on to mammals and birds.

She tries to stick with North American animals, although she has done work with animals from both Europe and the Far East before.

“Within these paintings, the animal is not extinct,” Gallery owner Bobbie DeMatteis said. “You really have to look to see the animal.

“It’s like looking back through the past to try and find the animal through the haze. It’s compelling.”

The artist’s proceeds from the exhibit will be donated to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

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