

## BARBARA CAMPBELL THOMAS: PNEUMA

*Equal parts collage, fabric, and sketchwork, Barbara Campbell Thomas couples paint with quiltwork in her contemplative study of where the spiritual meets the physical*

For artist Barbara Campbell Thomas, “pneuma”, stemming from the ancient Greek word for “breath”, is a creative force and spirit which guides everything that she does. As an abstract painter, Barabra’s work is a meditation on giving form to that “breath”, a commitment to capturing what is unsayable.



Barbara Campbell Thomas, *Manner of Infinite Forms*, 2019.  
Acrylic and collage on canvas with sewn fabric.

Combining bright hues of color, layers of paint, and the technique of sewing, Barbara’s paintings are as much about the physical process itself as they are about the final product. “Painting for me is very much a kind of referencing to a bodily activity,” says Barbara. “I think about painting in a kind of physical way, what it is like to work with materials.”

One process that is central to Barabra’s work in particular is sewing and creating patterns through quilting. Her connection to sewing came from her mother, who is a quilter herself. Learning from her mother how to quilt in 2014, Barbara immediately became attracted to the activity of what is called piecing, which is sewing together shapes side by side to create a seam. “There’s this literal way in which it was a sort of

building of a surface. That felt...very satisfying physically as an activity.”

Another dimension of Barabra’s work are her sketchbooks, the covers of which are quilted by her mother. An intense record of her thought process for the past 20 years, the sketchbooks are an integral part of her studio practice. “The sketchbooks always predict what’s going to come. I try to not limit myself in terms of what I’m willing to make. I really allow things that seem sort of strange or feel like they’re kind of coming out of left field for me.”

The linear aspect of her thoughts comes to life through her paintings. In particular, *Pneuma*, which the exhibition is named after, went through a drastic overhaul over the course of the pandemic. It was the first time she took a painting off and recut and resewed it back together. The development of her ideas is a testament to how being open to adapting is not only a part of being an artist, but also integral to shaping identity. “Figuring out who we are, of course, is a process of figuring out what we like and what we don’t like. But there’s also this way in which we have to start to inquire into what are the limitations we place on ourselves that are closing out possibility and what are the limitations that we place on ourselves that are opening up possibility.”

*Pneuma* is on view in the Ruffin Gallery until December 18, 2020.



Barbara Campbell Thomas, *Pneuma*, 2019. Acrylic and collage on canvas with sewn fabric.

## PNEUMA: LIST OF WORKS

*All works are acrylic and fabric on collage*

1. *Pneuma*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 72"x60"
2. *Inscape*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 72"x60"
3. *Manner of Infinite Forms*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2019, 72"x60"  
owned by the City of Raleigh Municipal Art Collection
4. *The Expanse as Probable Infinite*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2019, 36"x30"
5. *Turn*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 36"x30"
6. *Inbale*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 36"x30"
7. *Exhale*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 36"x30"
8. *1, 2, 3*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2019, 22"x20"
9. *Radiate*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 22"x20"
10. *Pieced*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 22"x20"
11. *Lectio Opening*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 17"x15"
12. *Lectio (purple)*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 17"x15"
13. *Lectio (blue)*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 17"x15"
14. *Lectio (striped)*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 17"x15"
15. *Spine*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 15"x17"
16. *Pneuma Study #1*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 9"x8"
17. *Pneuma Study #2*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 9"x8"
18. *Pneuma Study #3*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 9"x8"
19. *Pneuma Study #4*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 9"x8"
20. *Pneuma Study #5*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 9"x8"
21. *Pneuma Study #6*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 9"x10"
22. *Pneuma Study #7*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 9"x10"
23. *Pneuma Study #8*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 9"x10"
24. *Pneuma Study #9*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 9"x10"
- 25-35. *Sketchbook/Notebook*, Barbara Campbell Thomas, 2020, 11"x7"

## ABOUT BARBARA CAMPBELL THOMAS

Barbara Campbell Thomas lives and works in Climax, North Carolina. Her work combines painting with quilting, overlaying their material vocabularies to create complex formal dialogues within each painting that resonate with the details of her own life and the history of each medium. She came relatively late to quilting, which she learned from her mother, but quickly realized its power as an art form traditionally practiced by women to inform and expand the range of painting.

Barbara Campbell Thomas's paintings have been exhibited in museums and galleries across the United States, at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, The Painting Center, the Atlanta Center for Contemporary Art, The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art and the North Carolina Museum of Art. She has been an artist-in-residence at the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences, the Skowhegan School for Painting and Sculpture and, in 2021, she will attend the Elizabeth Murray Artist Residency. She is a recent recipient of a North Carolina Artists Fellowship.

Barbara Campbell Thomas is an Associate Professor of Art at UNC Greensboro.



*To see more of Barbara's work, visit [barbaracampbellthomas.com](http://barbaracampbellthomas.com)*

## ON VIEW

October 26 - December 18, 2020, Ruffin Gallery

To make a reservation to view *Pneuma*, visit [art.as.virginia.edu/ruffin-gallery](http://art.as.virginia.edu/ruffin-gallery).

## EXPLORING PNEUMA: A CONVERSATION WITH BARBARA CAMPBELL

To read an interview with Barbara Campbell Thomas on her inspirations, artistic process, and philosophy of life, visit [art.as.virginia.edu/ruffin-gallery](http://art.as.virginia.edu/ruffin-gallery).

## RUFFIN GALLERY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

Since 2008, the Ruffin Gallery is an active part of the Studio Art program. Each year the gallery hosts four to six exhibits that serve as the University's most important showcase for contemporary art and are an integral part of the Studio Art experience. Students are involved with the production and installation of these exhibitions and gain valuable experience in the handling and hanging of important works of all types. The gallery hosts a show by each year's Ruffin Distinguished Artist-in-Residence. Every spring the gallery is the site of the Fourth-Year Thesis and Aunspaugh Fellows Exhibitions. The openings are important occasions when the whole studio program gathers to celebrate the successful completion of the major. In addition to the Ruffin Gallery, student and visiting artist work is frequently shown in the RuffStuff and Media Galleries on the first floor of Ruffin Hall.

## ADDRESS

Ruffin Gallery  
179 Culbreth Road  
Charlottesville, VA 22903

## PRESS CONTACT

Liza Pittard, Marketing & Visiting Artist Coordinator,  
University of Virginia Art Department  
[eap4dg@virginia.edu](mailto:eap4dg@virginia.edu)  
Press release by Olivia Pettee '24