

TRENDING: Cops: Local man blames girlfriend for thievery

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Snowmass Sun

Artist Sarah Cain returns to see her Snowmass mural in action



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Anna Stonehouse/The Aspen Times |

Artist Sarah Cain photographed during her talk at the Aspen Art Museum on Feb. 16.

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An art installation doesn't get much more remote than Sarah Cain's site-responsive mural "Mountain Song" at Elk Camp Restaurant on Snowmass. Out here in the hinterlands of Colorado ski country, it's reachable in winter only by riding a gondola, by skiing or by undertaking an arduous uphill climb in the snow to the mid-mountain lodge.

That's fine by Cain, the California-based artist told an audience over President's Day weekend at the Aspen Art Museum after seeing it in action for the first time. She'd rather her work land there than in the cold white cube of a museum gallery.

"When I was coming up, I hated going to museums," Cain explained. "I felt like, 'Here's a great piece of art. You put it here and it dies.' I wanted to make work that was active, that made the viewer feel and see it in the present tense."

If You Go ...

What: Sarah Cain's 'Mountain Song'

The February visit marked Cain's first trip to see the massive mural since the [Aspen Skiing Co.](#) and the

Where: Elk Camp, Snowmass Ski Area

When: Through Sept. 30

More info: <http://www.aspenartmuseum.org>

[Aspen Art Museum unveiled it on Thanksgiving.](#)

Cain created it in October, during the desolate offseason on the mountain.

"It was really peaceful," she said of her time alone at Elk Camp, "a totally different experience from going up there today."

The four-canvas mural is nearly 30 feet long and more than 9 feet tall. It pops with vibrant, cheerful colors and kinetic graffiti marks layered with acrylic and gouache and sculptural elements. She has sliced rectangular swatches of canvas and braided them together — the braids sway a bit and bring an uncanny liveliness to the piece.

Seeing "Mountain Song" amid the chaos of kids and skiers and snowboarders over a busy holiday weekend pleased the artist, who made the piece with them in mind.

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"I knew it was going to be really active," she said. "I really wanted to make a piece that could contend with all that action up there."

In her art talk, Cain walked the crowd through her career and connected some of the creative dots in her work, including her recent three-dimensional mural "Now I'm Going to Tell You Everything" in a courtyard of the new Institute of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and her upcoming show at Anthony Meier in London.

Cain explained that she started her career by going into abandoned buildings and making works on the floors and walls there. Looking at a slide of an abandoned-building piece from nearly 20 years ago, she said: "It does inform what I'm still doing."

That piece, she noted, had a long black stripe running across a wood floor. The stripe, she pointed out, seems to function much like a big black dot at the far left in the largely day-glo "Mountain Song." She was unsure what these black masses mean, she said, though sensing they are meaningful.

"The way I work is to kind of attack and resolve and then my brain catches up — sometimes years later," she said.

Recently she made a work that transformed an empty parking garage in London. And, in the largest project she's tackled to date, she's at work on an enormous piece for San Francisco International Airport made from stained glass and fused glass set to open in 2019.

Cain works improvisationally, feeding off of the space where she's making an installation. She's worked with mattresses, rose petals, bras and benches and backpacks (she referred to her materials as "junk" but also said the artistic process "elevates it past junk").

And though Cain said she resists explaining her work too much, she did offer some insight about the 12 curious dollar bill paintings that she's hung in a stairway around the corner from "Mountain Song" at Elk Camp. They're talismans, she said, part of a long-running project where she paints on dollar bills and gives them to friends for good fortune.