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“Migrate” is a 2011 abstract mixed-media collage by Gayle Crites.

When she was in the eighth grade, Gayle Crites’ father took a sabbatical from his job with the Denver Public Schools and moved the whole family to Guadalajara, Mexico, for a year. It ignited a wanderlust in his daughter that has never been snuffed.

“When I have a little bit of money, I’d rather have a good trip than a new couch or new car,” Crites told the Journal with a laugh. What excites her about travel is learning about different cultures and new and old art techniques — knowledge that the Golden, Colo.-based artist incorporates into her work.

An exhibition of her abstract mixed-media collages opens today at Chiaroscuro Contemporary Art’s two main spaces at Gypsy Alley on Canyon Road. “Passport” is the culmination of years of work, travel and thought focused on globalization and how it is affecting indigenous cultures around the world, Crites said.

“Globalization is a force that enhances an interconnected and economically integrated world, yet via that process is also the force that threatens cultural identities and aids in the dissolution of the Earth’s unique tribes,” she said.

If you go

WHAT: “Passport,” abstract mixed-media collages by Gayle Crites

WHEN: Today through June 4; reception 5-7 p.m. today.

WHERE: Chiaroscuro Contemporary Art, 702 1/2 and 708 Canyon Road

CONTACT: 992-0711

The materials Crites uses come directly from her travels, she said. Her collages are large, grounded on Japanese paper she bought on a trip with her younger son, or on Tonganese “white papa,” hand-pounded bark she discovered while visiting her older son in Hawaii. She layers on textiles and other items from her ethnographic studies and makes detailed line drawings with ink and a Japanese brush or with silk dyes or natural indigo she has precipitated herself with sodium chloride. The result is an organic “globalization” within a frame, creating a visual record that bears an eerie resemblance to the ledger drawings of 19th-century Native Americans.

“Crites’ work pulls the viewer into a dialog with rare materials and processes of traditional art-making that employ her decidedly contemporary abstract mark-making,” Chiaroscuro director John Addition noted. “This dichotomy sets up a tension and release that brings each piece of artwork to life.”

That early year spent in Guadalajara “became a gateway for really wanting to explore other cultures” and meet other people, Crites said. She’s spent both short and long sojourns in Mexico — she earned a degree in art history and economics at the University of Mexico in Guadalajara after getting a bachelor’s degree at Colorado State University — and in South and Central America, Spain, Japan and Hawaii.

“Hawaii is a great place for meeting people from all different corners of the world,” Crites said. She was visiting her marine-scientist son there when she met a family from Tonga and learned about the hand-pounded bark of a tree from the mulberry family that the women of Tonga make for mats to sit on at important meetings. “The collaborative nature of it really hit me hard. It’s made by 70- and 80-year-old women; it’s a dying art,” Crites said. “I’m very fortunate to have been able to have a lot of it. It’s not something they usually sell,” she said. “This material inspired this whole show, really. I’m trying to celebrate things that are accessible yet truly dying arts.”

She said she usually starts with Japanese paper for her ground, and paints on it with silk dye. Then she adds the pounded bark, which has small holes through which the color in the paper painting shows. She adds other tribal items, and then does her drawings in Japanese ink with a very finely engineered brush she found in Japan. “If I can go back to Japan, I’ll bring back a few dozen more of them,” she said. “That brush changed everything about my work. It turned my world upside down. The line I can make holds, even on the bark.”

In her artist’s statement for the show at Chiaroscuro, Crites said she has combined handmade materials by indigenous artisans in different parts of the world, including the bark poundings from Tonga, camel-hair weavings from Iraq, paper from Japan, natural indigo from India, and silk from China.

“Many of the materials in these works are soon to be culturally obsolete,” she said. “Superimposed over these rare indigenous art forms are intricate brush marks, drawn to represent our interconnectedness through the Internet.”

Crites added that most of the compositions have no vertical or horizontal preference for hanging “and therefore represent an absence of geographic longitude and latitude.

“The large forms created by the brush-and-ink drawings reflect the basic and universal elements of indigenous craft design, including circles, triangles, squares, spirals and crosses,” she said. “I hope to express the beauty in the complexity of this repeating and universally symbolic script.”