



Lifestyle

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Art as impulsive snapshots of life

BY TRACEY O'SHAUGHNESSY | REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

All human action comes down to the reflexive or the considered. We like to think that most of our actions are intentional, but a lot of what we do and how we do it comes down to impulse. This is wonderfully illustrated in the current exhibition at the Washington Art Association, in Washington Depot.

Kim Sobel has spent much of her artistic career investigating the difference between the deliberate and the instinctive act, and her painting is an amalgam of both. Certainly her colors — rich violets and vivid fuchsias, buttery yellow and cotton-candy pink — suggest a rigorous calibration of thought. But their application — furious slashes and cursive spirals — suggest a more spontaneous, emotive reflex.

The results are enormous paintings that tear away at abstract principles even as they resist figurative constriction. These are big, bold, colorful gushes of fury and restraint. Works like "Roaring In the Night," a huge work of oil, acrylic, gamsol and wax on linen, is a cyclone of violet exclamations and whorls of chartreuse that expose slices of gray and stabs of blood red. In a number of places, the paint appears stripped off, to reveal an oozing, deeply textured eggplant.

A dervish-like excitement seeps out of many of these works, like "Wild Earth Forgotten," a huge canvas of dashing orbs of mossy green, hoops of magenta and tangerine.

All of this emoting and color-coordination takes space; Sobel's paintings work best on a large stage. Her smaller works look like jigsaw puzzles compared to the big narratives she creates, either horizontally, or, in the case of "Equilibrium," in a square.

This last piece, with its fiery splashes of plum exploding from the upper left corner into streaks of tangerine, crimson and magenta, feels like genuine joy.

Conversely, Susan Spencer's abstract landscapes, in the second gallery, feel more subdued and less unified.

Her work is primarily about the relationship between color, line and texture and, strangely, works best in her smaller, elegant, pastoral abstracts than in her larger oils.

Color and its emotive qualities are intrinsic to Constance Aronson's flamboyant still lifes and landscapes. These vibrant works — imagine a collision between van Gogh and Matisse — are painted thickly in bold, primary colors, heavily worked up and richly ornamented.

They run the gamut from gleeful to gaudy, all of it intentional, from the swirling decorative orbs in multi-hued vases to gargantuan variegated leaves that seem just this side of carnivorous.

Aronson paints all the frames — generally — in a checkerboard pattern that picks up from the fiery color in the painting.

The effect is destabilizing and delicious.

Aronson's flowers, of bold red, orange and yellow, lick the edges of frames limned with French blue, gold and pink. In works like "Two Red Peonies," Aronson insists that more is more.

Even her relatively subdued landscapes, whose flat forms suggest Marsden Hartley, Aronson injects energy from within the layers of frame, which vivify the canvas and suggest that this art just goes on and on.

The exhibition continues through March 22 at the Washington Art Association, Washington Depot. For more information, call (860) 868-2878.