

# EXPRESSIVE PAINTING 2013

The Cultural Center at Rocky Neck  
6 Wonson Street  
Gloucester, Massachusetts

Through January 27

Abstract art can be divisive, inspiring both devotion and disdain — with its admirers appreciating its rich context and cerebral, inside-the-canvas themes, and its critics abhorring its lack of form and, some say, talent.

"It does take more time to live with an abstract painting," acknowledged Ruth Mordecai, curator of "Expressive Painting 2013," which aims to explore the complex and demanding nature of abstraction. "It demands more from the viewer, perhaps. It's like getting to know a person — it takes time."

Running through January 27 at the Cultural Center at Rocky Neck in Gloucester, the show features about 20 pieces from a mix of artists — some whose CVs include national and international shows, some who are just starting to reveal their work to the world — including Mordecai, Yhanna Coffin, Mary Cole, Susan Erony, Laurel Hughes, Deborah Lloyd Kaufman and Tom Nihan.

Encompassing acrylic, oil and mixed media on paper and canvas, the pieces range in both size



Yhanna Coffin *Grief*, mixed media 52" x 52"

and substance. Some of the forms and themes are recognizable; some are purely abstract, laying bare moods, movements and themes with intense brushwork, shapes, shading, rich layers and patterns of circles.

Hughes' "Grace on Water," to start, embodies just that: light billows and veils, layers and drips of purples, blues, whites and greens invite the viewer to visualize the water scene within. It is muted and soft, graceful, with simple hints at shapes and movement, evoking Monet's later paintings of the bridge in his Giverny garden.

As the artist explains in her statement, stillness and action coexist, marks "converse" with one another, and sounds, sensations and quick glimpses give life to her paintings — they are able to emerge, grow, evolve and change. "I use the nuances of a given moment to explore themes of joy, grace, harmony, laughter, and ultimately a greater awareness of our interconnectedness between all living things," she writes.

Cole's "Things are not always what they seem" is a different expression of energy and sensation: a blur and whirl of color and motion — swirls, blocky shapes, clouds and formless smudges in white, blue, red, black, yellow and purple — pull the eyes in a sort of frenetic dance around the canvas.

Coffin's much starker "Grief," meanwhile, presents what could be interpreted as a lone wailing figure,



Tom Nihan, *Collage Circles #1*, 2012, mixed media 16" x 16"

lost in the black and gray of pain. Shapes and images are "carriers" of feelings — both their delicacy and their intensity — the artist writes in her statement, and she aims to create tangible images, shapes, and colors out of unconscious impulses. "What I love about painting is the immediacy, the responsiveness of paint to my touch, the power of a line or shape to carry a sense of authenticity," she writes.

Mordecai, for her part, is impelled and fascinated by figures, gesture, and movement, as well as biblical themes. But her work also smudges the lines between different disciplines. For instance, "Between painting and sculpture" integrates part of



Deborah Lloyd Kaufman, *Rainforest*, 2010, acrylic, 40" X 30".

a landscape that she tore from another work, and hints at her background in sculpture, in which she crafted slab and steel shapes. In the piece — which is dominated by muted gray, white, black and yellow

— curves, contours, boxes, lines, and twists grow out of a sort of base, building upon itself.

"It's more the excitement of mark-making, the expressive quality of a line, the balance of things, the background, the foreground," Mordecai explained. "There's always some kind of motion in my work."

But beyond embracing the expressive in all its forms and non-forms, the show also strives to highlight Gloucester — but with a brighter (and wider) light than it may have used in the past. "Gloucester needs to be known for everything else that's happening here. There aren't only plein air painters — there's all this other work going on," Mordecai said. Particularly, she noted the Cultural Center — which is host to lectures, exhibitions and workshops, its numerous studios and galleries, the Gloucester Stage, the Gloucester Writers Center, the Goetemann Residency program, the Cape Ann Museum, the Ocean Alliance, the Judith Sargent Murray House, and the Maritime Heritage Center. Rocky Neck was recently designated one of Massachusetts' first cultural districts.

The aim is to stress not only the "rich cultural heritage" of Milton Avery, Edward Hopper and Nell Blaine, but also the thriving community of the present. "It's terrific what's happening here," Mordecai said.

As for the show, although the pieces are all quite different — and each is drawn from varying modes of memory, sensation, feeling, movement, color, shape and the unexplained lying just beneath — the thread that draws them together is their honesty. They're also free of fads, Mordecai said, and were created from the "core" of both the artist and the person. Viewers can have a rewarding experience by coming with an open mind to "just be" with the work, she said.

Ultimately, for any piece of art — objective or not — to be successful, she noted, it "has to feed that primal energy that comes through, as well as an intelligence that has a way of sorting it, to make it a whole."

Taryn Plumb



1  
2 | 13