

Kerrie Warren Charts a New Frontier for Abstract Expressionism

The phrase "Physician heal thyself" seems to apply auspiciously to the Australian artist Kerrie Warren, whose paintings are on view at Agora Gallery, 530 West 25th Street, from June 2 through 23. (Reception: Thursday June 4, from 6 to 8PM.)

For after attaining a diploma in Transpersonal Art Therapy, with the idea that it would provide her with a means of support while following her true path as a painter, Warren eventually discovered that she had been drawn to painting primarily "for my own healing and evolvment as a person, as an artist."

Thus she now paints full-time in her rural studio in Crossover, Victoria, approximately an hour from the capital city of Melbourne. Yet, ironically, it would appear that the curative aspect of her work may still be more contagiously extensive than she thinks, given the serenity that radiates out from her paintings when one encounters them in a gallery context.

"My reference points are internal, my influences are environmental and I feel a deep connection with nature and the

energy of life," Warren states; all of which may account in part for the meditative feeling of peaceful calm that her work promotes in the viewer. But in purely painterly terms, her technique also has a great deal to do with it.



"Patterns in Chaos"

Unlike many Australian artists who look closer to home for artistic models, attempting to emulate well known Australian modern painters such as Sidney Nolan or Brett Whiteley, Warren was drawn to Abstract Expressionism. Of the artists in that American movement, she is closest in both spirit and technique to those who work in an "overall" mode of composition such as Milton Resnick, and, especially, Richard Pousette-Dart, who once stated, "I am an artist of the concealed power of the spirit, not of the brute physical form."

The same might be said of Warren, whose thickly encrusted surfaces seem to undergo a magical metamorphosis from the material to the ethereal and emit actual light. A strong sense of movement also comes into play in her large acrylics on canvas such as "Patterns in Chaos," "Composing Chaos," and "Organised Chaos," where myriad minute particulate forms ap-

pear to swarm within the composition like dancing atoms.

The vital new scientific field of quantum physics provides Warren with some of her inspiration. In an artist's statement issued by the gallery in connection with her exhibition, she speaks of "the tracking and marking of energy," as well as "finding patterns within chaos." Indeed, it is the patterns that she finds within the chaos that enables the viewer, with the slightest perceptual shift of vision, to arrest the movement that she generates with her vigorous swirling strokes and discover the serene stillness at the heart of her compositions.

And this duality of effect, manifesting in the constant perceptual shifts that occur as one contemplates her paintings for prolonged periods of time, is what distinguishes Warren's work significantly from that of Abstract Expressionist predecessors like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning.

For Kerrie Warren appears to have evolved the capacity, through the layering of intricate tiny strokes of mainly pure primary hues that ultimately seem to meld into a single energy field, to simultaneously animate and stabilize all activity on the picture plane, and finally apprehend the calm stillness at the center of the painterly storm.

— Maureen Flynn

Nuria Rabanillo Paints "Everyperson" in the Abstract

Not too long ago figurative and abstract art were at opposite ends of the aesthetic spectrum. The dawning of the postmodern era, however, created a détente between contending tendencies and opened up a whole new range of visual possibilities for artists who wished to express facets of our increasingly complex and fragmented reality while creating work that was also innovative.

One artist who has evolved a synthesis that succeeds splendidly in both regards is the Spanish painter Nuria Rabanillo, whose solo show was seen recently at Montserrat Contemporary Art, 547 West 27th Street, in Chelsea, and whose work is included in the gallery's year-round salon exhibition.

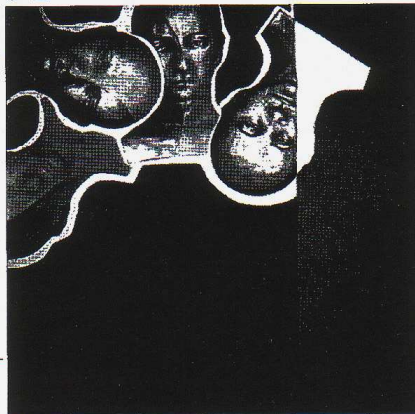
The first thing that struck one upon entering the gallery during Rabanillo's exhibition was the sheer abstract impact of her mostly large acrylic paintings on canvas and smaller works in the same medium on linen or paper.

Overall, the colors in Rabanillo's compositions are relatively subdued, often with large areas of black and/or brown defining the dominant forms; yet they are highlighted here and there with piquant bursts of brighter red, orange, green, violet, or blue hues — usually contained within specific areas. However, it is the stark tonal contrasts that lends her work its formidable presence,

with fragmented figurative elements, specifically heads, set against geometric areas of hard-edged color.

These heads are surrounded by thick white lines that could either suggest spiritual auras or the blank areas for cutting around paper dolls. (Such ambiguousness is one of the things that makes Rabanillo's paintings so intriguingly enigmatic.) But however the individual viewer cares to interpret them, one thing is inescapable: they seem to speak volumes about the sense of isolation, disconnection, and alienation that many people feel in the modern world.

Thus, like the depersonalized figures of the American sculptor Ernest Trova or the emaciated subjects of the Swiss sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti, they have a universal resonance that is made all the more dramatic by the emblematic abstract forms in Rabanillo's paintings. And for all their cookie-cutter sameness, their features are subtly expressive, perhaps a bit melancholy, as if to suggest the repressed emotions beneath the impassive masks that most of us must wear as we go about our



"Silencios"

daily business in a global context which has already surpassed the wildest imaginings of science fiction writers.

Indeed, Rabanillo's faces seem to stand for the existential plight of "Everyperson," lending a hint of irony to a title such as "Silencios," for a large painting of overlapping faces floating unmoored against a

color field divided into black and brown rectangles. And in an even larger canvas called "Serenidad," a long row of faces, enlivened like a color chart by a spectrum of vibrant hues, suggest targets in a shooting gallery.

Also including smaller works (ominously reminiscent of 9/11 from a New Yorker's point of view) in which tall buildings awash in acidic hues loom against skies where airplanes and helicopters swarm like tiny insects, this exhibition revealed Nuria Rabanillo to be an artist who combines formidable formal statements with a singularly fascinating, if slightly eerie, slant on modern life.

— Maurice Taplinger