

art from the heart

Whether it is paint splashed across canvas or something more definitive, abstract art holds personal meaning for local artists

By Yael Menahem
Oregon Daily Emerald

The definition of abstract art can be as abstract as the art itself.

"Put[ting] things together in a different way," is artist Rakar West's simple definition of the art form.

West is part of a local group of artists who are exhibiting their current works in the Springfield Museum under the name Women Artists' Marketing Cooperative, or WAMCO. The exhibit is part of the museum's series "Moving Forward: Art for the 21st Century."

WAMCO is made up of abstract artists Pat Arrera, Ruth Ann Howden, Natalie Shifrin Whitson and West.

West discovered abstract art many years ago on a trip to New York City where she visited the Museum of Modern Art and read about the movement in several art books.

"I responded emotionally and physically [to the art]," West says. "I felt like this was something that I wanted to do."

Through her art, which mainly involves landscapes from across Oregon, West is trying to emulate the definition of the art through her own interpretation.

"I'm trying to paint something that you really can't see, like relationships, changing weather, emotional needs of people [or] moving water," she says.

Throughout her work, West uses different materials such as acrylic on a hard board and some metal parts. For instance, on two separate pieces currently on display, she bolted down aluminum strips to the hard board and then painted on the metal.

Her works should look familiar to Oregonians, who will recognize her references to Crater Lake and coastal sand dunes.

"I love Oregon so much and there's such varied landscape," West says, although she admits that a recent trip to Scotland is conjuring up new images for future abstract pieces.

Each of the four artists in the show holds a fine arts degree and also draws upon their varied life experiences from all around the world.

Arrera lived on the South Pacific island of American Samoa for several years, and her experiences of living by the jungle comes through in her work. She uses more traditional materials such as oil paintings on canvas to express her art. Arrera

says that abstract art is a challenge, which is why she's attracted to the style.

"It's a way to express what I want to do in a way that works for me," she says. "It's more difficult to do that with realistic images."

To Arrera, realistic images are photographs and other still images that don't involve the stroke of a brush, but she wants to take things a step further.

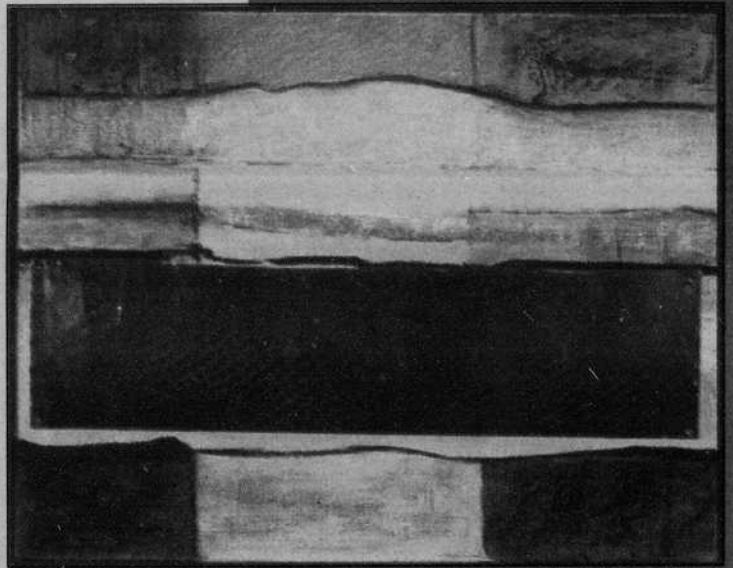
"If I want to express something else, something beyond what a [realistic] image tells me, I go to abstract art," she says.

The abstract style was introduced to the art world a few decades ago, West says, and it uses shapes that are not necessarily recognizable in nature. Many people may not know about abstract art, and West believes that a new art form is not always automatically accepted.

"It takes an art media decades to be accepted or to influence the art world and for people to understand it and get used to seeing it," she said.

The WAMCO art-ists have exhibited their work locally, nationally and internationally in an attempt to enlighten more people about the art style. Arrera and West encourage other art enthusiasts to visit the Springfield Museum to experience this art form as they experience and promote it.

The Springfield Museum is located on the corner of Sixth and Main streets. The show is currently open and runs through Jan. 29. The museum hours are Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from noon to 5 p.m. Artwork on display is also for sale.



Courtesy of Rakar West
(above) Pat Arrera's "Jungle Dance II" is an oil painting on birch. (below) Rakar West's "Steens Mountain-Alvord Desert" is acrylic paint on aluminum, mounted on masonite. Both pieces and others can be viewed at the Springfield Museum.

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