

ART

High art

Things are looking up for Portland artist

BY HERON

Remember when you were a kid lying under a big oak and you saw how cool the leaves looked against the sky? Patricia Millar remembers that, too. In fact, she has made an art of seeing that.

Millar, 40, works in oil on panels. When you first look at her work, you see abstract patterns in bold colors. On second glance, you recognize leaf shapes, like when you stare up at trees. (You know you are looking up because there is no horizon.)

The exceptionally strong imagery is not inter-

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"Ultramarine Blue #1"

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"It's about the color," Millar explains, "the light and the colors. It's tree imagery. It allows people to get the color."

And it's true. Your eyes recognize the leaf patterns, yet there is no recognizable shape, no focal point to rest on. What's left is pure color. The effect is stunning.

Millar sees her work as marking the line dividing representational art from abstract art. "People have a hard time with abstract art," she explains. "They can't really get it," which is why she refrains from crossing that line. "People need a place to land."

Thus, she gives you that moment when you look up into the tops of trees. It's a familiar, comforting sight yet almost abstract.

"I'm really mesmerized by that," Millar confides. "I take a walk and there's that light pat-

tern going on. I find that very exciting." Millar has vivid memories from her childhood in northern New Jersey. "I remember drawing pictures when I was 5 or 6," she says. "I had a little blackboard, and I drew characters and told myself stories about the characters." She's been drawing and painting ever since.

Millar took all of the art classes available to her. "We were half an hour from New York, so our high school took a lot of field trips," she says.

She visited New York's famous art museums, which had a huge influence on her. One day at

the Whitney, she had an epiphany.

"I saw a Mark Rothko painting. I stood in front of the painting thinking, 'How did he do that?'"

The 20-year-old was so impressed by his abstract expressionist work that she decided: "That's what I want to do.... I was mesmerized by that painting just like I was mesmerized by the light in the trees. I still get that [feeling] from his work."

But when it came time for college, her parents discouraged her from pursuing art as a major, saying, "Artists are a dime a dozen." Instead, she studied psychology, then moved to San Francisco, where some friends lived.

She lived there for several years, then moved to Bellingham, Wash., with a lover. "Bellingham was dark and cold," Millar recalls. "The woman I was dating at the time dumped me because I was an artist. She told me she couldn't handle it. She wanted someone with a



"Hoggar Blue #1"

secure financial future, so we broke up."

Millar decided to go back to San Francisco but stopped in Portland to visit a friend for a short while. "I never left," she says. "I had no real reason to go back to San Francisco. Portland is the right place for me. Plenty of greenery, lots of trees."

Then she decided to go back to school and study art, the way she always wanted to. She graduated in 1997 with a bachelor's degree from Marylhurst University.

While there Millar met Candace Larson. Unlike her first love, "Candace said: 'An artist! That's so sexy!'"

They've been together for more than eight years. "Candace is very supportive."

Although Larson is not an artist, Millar counts on her to assess each new painting. "She has a good eye. I trust her opinion. I share every aspect of my art with her."

The pair enjoy exploring art together. They go to galleries, museums and displays of all kinds, even visiting Europe to seek out more inspiration. "We have a passion for travel."

Never troubled with self-doubt, Millar focuses on art as her life's goal. "My art is good. It will sell," she declares confidently.

Although she must take odd jobs to help support herself, she sees herself as a professional and trusts that someday her art will sustain her.

Allan Oliver, owner/director of ONDA Gallery, says Millar's work "expands our consciousness of change and impermanence and helps us sense an underlying structure plan." He adds that the paintings offer "subtle shadings of nature that catch our spirits and give us strength."

She just might inspire you to gaze up at the sky through fall leaves, too. **JM**

Paintings by PATRICIA MILLAR will be on display from Oct. 25 to Nov. 27 at ONDA Gallery, 2215 N.E. Alberta St.

HERON is a Portland artist and free-lance writer.



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