

ART

Elemental roots

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The vastness of space in this large oil on canvas plays with twilight, and its starred sky and teal waters absorb the mysterious light source. The jagged little islands, like embossed anthropomorphic paw prints, have an admitted inherent irony with its pert, almost sodlike opaque green grasses.

Shelton explains that her paint is applied from the center out, like the body's chakras. By using an opaque projector she is able to apply repetitive shapes with a quirky post-Van Gogh effect. It's hung alongside "Island Is Four Logs in Green Sea," and the two almost act as a diptych behind the main counter of this fashionably appointed but minimalist shop retrofitted with some of the best vintage wines in the city.

Shelton was overjoyed at the pairing of the pieces in that they depict a continuous horizon line and unfold a story of sorts. Proprietor David Cowling, aka Bald Guy (as it reads on his business card), wants his new business to act as a unique community info center for the finer points of the special vintages he stocks.

Born and raised in Salem, Shelton has identified as an artist since a young child and as a lesbian since 1976. With a master of fine arts from Washington State University, she is a certified arts educator in Portland—a city she appreciates for its gay-friendly atmosphere. She's also working as a parent/child development specialist with Portland Impact, an organization that helps alleviate the effects of poverty.

Shelton has shown her work in numerous locations around the Pacific Northwest since the late 1970s; currently she's part of the *Art About Agriculture* series, on view through Sept. 2 at the High Desert Museum in Bend. The exhibit was designed to encourage artists to visually explore the resources of agriculture, the science that sustains human life. She's also supported by Portland's Full Spectrum Health Center, which displays some of her paintings year-round.

Shaffer, who holds a master's in sociology and markets and promotes a Portland photographer, says she has always felt a nurturing, familial spirit in her own many creative endeavors.

The common themes of birth, energy, organics and fire bring Shelton and Shaffer together in a unique way. Almost simultaneously based in the human subconscious, both speak eloquently about chakra and aura as primary energies driving their creative expression. They see the animated self in the elements they paint and draw.



"Island with Three Trees and Green Sea" is a substantial 3-by-5 oil on canvas

Shelton's "Tree Light" uses a radiant technique to cast its trees' shadows. The street lamp light source is not visibly present, and the illusion here makes the light seem to be stemming from the earth. The trees, with caricaturelike lifelines, are veiny, living beings. Shelton originally sketched this recent work on a black paper, discovering that light was at its core.

"Fire Ring" is Shelton's psychedelic ripple of cylindrical repeating rings paying certain homage to Harold "Doc" Edgerton, the MIT photographer who made significant developments in the area of stroboscopy. The piece centers in its dynamism of flaming fire water,

leaving the interpretation to the viewer.

In this salon-style installation Shaffer presents her piece "Birth of a Dream" (ink and colored pencil on ragboard), a piercing image of mountainous entities coming apart. Its intrinsic, nurturing energy is based on a dream of reawakening a desert lightning storm. The artist forthrightly confesses, "You cannot always know the intention of the work; your reactions may be latent." This untailored approach allows both women to be improvisers, open to fluidity as an opportunity to let go of initial intent.

Having recently returned from a shamanic workshop in Joshua Tree, Calif., Shaffer quotes a former teacher who once said, "Look at the magic of a piece and go with it; don't look back as you move ahead."

Shelton follows this lead in her work and stresses that letting go of the process a bit and standing back from a work in progress makes you realize that "within one piece there are many pieces." These words ring with a

brehtaking truth when you view the work here, in which she takes a subject and multiplies it with such a committed, organic purpose.

"It's really important to me," Shelton continues, "that people have the opportunity to make their own interpretations of the work." This is certainly the case right now at Everyday Wine, where many of the images could be dually seen as science-fiction encounters or out-of-body experiences. **JN**



Debra Shaffer's "Tree Giving Birth"

The art of MONTE SHELTON AND DEBRA SHAFFER shows

through July 24 at Everyday Wine, 1520 N.E. Alberta St. Hours are 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. See Shelton's work at www.paintmonte.com.

TJ NORRIS is a Portland visual artist, writer and curator. See his work at www.tjnorris.net.



Monte Shelton (left) and Debra Shaffer gather with friends at Everyday Wine

PHOTO BY MARY DANIS



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