

Colorful Nature, Minimalist Figures

Paintings by Satoko, Lindsay Kennedy

Satoko: *Transience*
White Lotus Gallery, Nov. 8-Dec. 16

Eugene painter Satoko tells the story of an 11th century Zen monk who warned against colors because of their seductive power. Herself under the spell of color, Satoko admits she cannot stop exploring its complexity in her paintings. Her most recent watercolors and oils are inspired by Tuscany, where she spends her summers, drawn by the qualities of the northern Mediterranean light.

Satoko gives us interpretations of Tuscany — internalized cityscapes and landscapes whose elements, such as buildings, are abstracted to their bare essentials. Correspondence between those buildings and their reflections or between trees and their shadows is only partial, an apt metaphor for the strongly evocative but ultimately independent way in which those paintings reflect the original landscapes.

"The beauty of nature is too great to be recreated," Satoko said. "The painting has to be something completely different from what you see. You can't copy."

To represent or evoke forms, Satoko does not use line, nor does she strive to suggest volume. She creates the impression of depth through multiple layers of sheer pigmentation. Satoko's physical and conceptual tool, the key to her compositions, is color. Color, and light, from which it is inseparable, are the true subjects of her paintings.

Fundamentally a fearless but subtle colorist, Satoko uses a bold palette of red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple that might turn garish or kitsch in less capable hands. She works with water, pigment and light to achieve luminous vibrancy and harmony. In *Reflection on Water* colors and light appear to dance, precisely as if reflected on water. In *Moons and Suns*, the abstracted elements of the painting — disks and cloud forms — are involved in a slow, ethereal dance, as if to their own music of the spheres.

Abstracted buildings constitute the only hard edges in her work. With the circles for moons and suns, they provide the only geometric forms as counterpoint to the dominant

organic forms of hills and clouds.

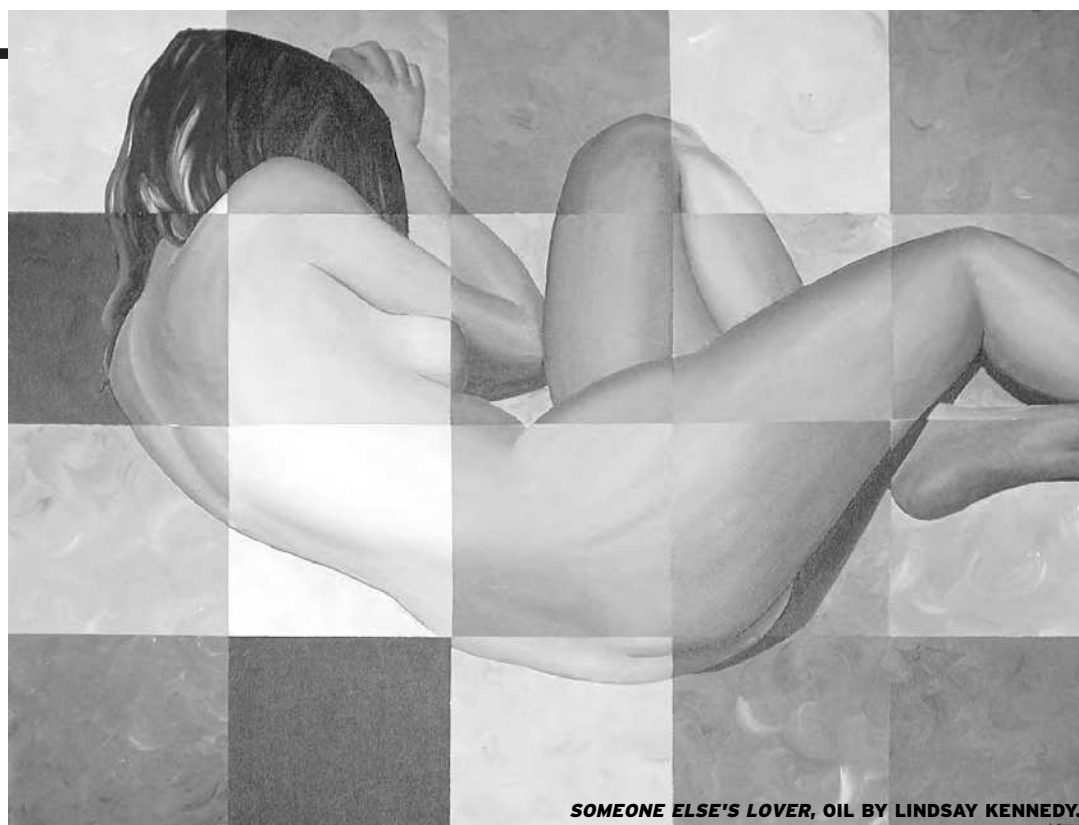
Water reflects both heaven and earth. In those dreamy landscapes the vertical order is subverted or made irrelevant, even when, as in *Reflection #2*, we can tell where the divide occurs between the landscape elements and their reflections. All appear suspended in a fugitive moment of time — time captured in its very passing, rather than as a frozen image.

In the two oil paintings, *Passage* and *Nocturne*, light is also a crucial component, but it is now light reflected off objects to which the medium has conferred solidity. Although both the oils and watercolors represent light, the watercolors produce the illusion of light caught between the layers of pigment, while the oils offer a higher sense of grounding.

The passion the painter herself feels for her medium and subject coexist paradoxically with a peaceful, contemplative element, the painter's mood. In the summer, Satoko spends the early hours of the morning and evening painting in the countryside. "It is very important for me to be alone and sit on a hill painting," she said, "but also experiencing the wind, smells, sounds. It's a physical experience that's at the source of my paintings, which are done in my studio."

"Sunrise and sunset are the times when I experience transience the most," she explained, "because I can see the sun moving. All the shadows of the clouds are visible, changing constantly, dancing on the hills, like the breathing skin of a living animal. That moment, that hill, those shadows, will never be repeated. This is what is called 'one encounter, one experience' in Japanese tea ceremony."

Watercolor is an appropriate medium for a study of the fugitive. Being aqueous, it slips and flows on the paper. Satoko's watercolors have an atmospheric quality. The eye is drawn into a layered mist of color, which it



SOMEONE ELSE'S LOVER, OIL BY LINDSAY KENNEDY.

can never quite seize and hold. We encounter no solidity. As viewers we are required to go with the flow, just as the painter does when dealing with the medium. "With watercolor, I just feel that I have to go with the flow of the water. It is like maneuvering a little boat on a river or ocean. I have to accept where the flow is going."

Satoko, born in Japan, living in Eugene and with a third home in Tuscany, may have found her roots in the study of transience.

Lindsay Kennedy:
Person Etcetera
Perugino Café (Nov. 7-Dec. 21)

Lindsay Kennedy's figurative oils offer a sharp contrast in approach to Satoko's work. At 22, Kennedy is fast learning mastery of the craft and finding her voice. *Person Etcetera* focuses mostly on the human figure, portraits and nudes, but also includes three unusual, tiny still lifes. *Closet Scene no 1*, a drastically cropped view of hangers and clothes, provides deadpan humor, while the red shoes fetchingly portrayed in *Flats* supply the single incidence of bright color.

"I was never drawn to bright colors," Kennedy said. "I love all the various tones of gray. They remind me of water and rocks, which I like a lot."

Kennedy's palette is distinctive for its cool, subdued tones and its minimalism, although it has expanded since her first series of strictly white-on-black paintings. Her palette now includes blues, grays, dark pinks, umber, and light flesh tones warmed by discrete pink undertones. Kennedy usually limits herself to three of these colors in a single painting and builds them up with numerous thin layers of paint applied with invisible brushstrokes.

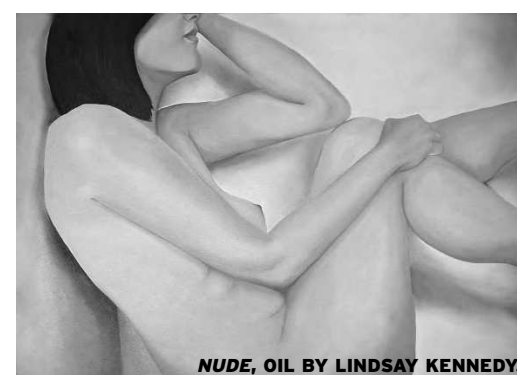
Eschewing line, Kennedy allows contrast in tone or value to delineate shapes. Similarly, facial features, anatomy and folds in garments are suggested through gradual shifts in value. Backgrounds are simple and kept to a single color.

Kennedy's paintings maintain an interesting tension between realistic modeling of the human figure and a sustained emphasis on the two-dimensionality of the canvas through her treatment of backgrounds as flat areas of color and her smooth application of paint.

In Kennedy's nudes, cropping serves to underline her formalist treatment of the human figure as an aesthetic object. Sometimes the entire lower body is cropped, and sometimes only the buttocks and legs are represented. Faces are cropped or hidden away, de-emphasizing the personal element.

Even when a personal story exists behind a painting, she resolves the personal through formal means rather than expressionistically. In *Someone Else's Lover*, a female nude lying on her side on the floor, her back to the viewer, is depicted through a grid of squares painted blue, umber and gray, a composition that can be interpreted in purely formal terms. Yet this painting chronicles the end of a relationship: Each square was painted in a darker or lighter color to express the painter's shifting feelings.

Another of Kennedy's compositional



NUDE, OIL BY LINDSAY KENNEDY.

devices — a counterpoint to her general predilection to partial views — is to provide a double perspective of the depicted subject matter. *Cups* presents two partial perspectives of a cup and books. *Ryan* is a double portrait of a young man whose back and profile appear on the left, a frontal view on the right. In *Me/Myself*, Kennedy plays with the notion of duality by representing her face pressed against its mirror image.

Whereas a more impersonal aesthetic approach serves Kennedy's nudes well, it is not as felicitous for her portraits. Effective portraits convey some essential trait of the individual. Too often in Kennedy's portraits, the impression we get is of an individual as sitter and the resulting stiffness he or she feels, rather than a sense of the person.

But Kennedy is just starting and so far has proved hard-working and quick-learning. She has talent, and I look forward to see where she will take it.

EW



**DUSK ON HILLS #3,
WATERCOLOR BY SATOKO.**