

Drawn to the Face

Painter Kris Ibach's work

Together, the recent works of painters Kris Ibach and Claudia Cilloniz Marchini form contrapuntal odes to the human face and the intensity of human emotion and experience. Their work shows at the Jacobs Gallery through Sept. 2.

PART I: KRIS IBACH

Ibach's preferred subject-matter when she did photography was the human face. Faithful portraits, however, are not what her large oils are about. She may begin with live models or photographs, but they are merely points of departure. She uses them "just to get the basic gesture," Ibach explained. "The paintings are not about anybody in particular. ... I keep trying for certain feelings of intensity, focusing on the face and the eyes," she said.

Ibach's palette contributes its own intensity, as does her use of chiaroscuro. Blacks and reds contrast with flesh tones and yellows. Her blacks are luminous and gleam as if still wet, which makes them appear even darker, yet fresh.

Ibach uses the glazing technique favored by the old masters. Rather than mixing colors on a palette, she applies layer after transparent layer to obtain different tones. What we perceive as black is the result of careful multiple transparent layering which allows light to go through to the white canvas and back again, adding further luminosity to the reflective glaze medium. Contrasting with the

depth provided by successive transparent layers, opaque red accents stand forward toward the viewer.

Unlike the old masters, Ibach keeps her vigorous brushstrokes visible to provide texture and movement. She also never erases what she decides to change, and these previous marks add texture by showing through further applications of paint. Ibach likened the glazing process to "a series of veils laid over one another" that contribute to the sense of mystery she seeks to convey.

Ibach, who started painting four years ago and graduated this year from UO, learned her glazing technique from Adam Grosowsky, painter and LCC instructor. Grosowsky also influenced Ibach in terms of palette and composition, and they share a predilection for the human face. Yet despite striking similarities of approach, Ibach's paintings remain her own.

She brings to her work mood and contained inten-

sity — an intensity kept in check even as it is dramatized in her subjects' gaze and facial expression. "The people who really live life and observe it are like that," Ibach said. "It's the not being fearful, that contained pride in being who you are, in doing what you do, I see that in certain people, I just see it in them, and it's very beautiful to me."

Slight facial distortions and misalignments contribute to the expressiveness of Ibach's figures. Strabismus and asymmetry of the eyes recurs often. One eye is lower or farther from the nose than the other, less detailed or not reflecting light in the same way.

Though perceptible, these distortions remain subtle enough or are handled just right to result in a double, paradoxical effect. On the one hand, they produce a sense of strangeness (*Unheimlichkeit*) that unsettles our expectations and rivets our attention. On the other, the distortions make her characters more real, alive, stronger and more intense. They add personality and drama, and oddly, a sense of truth captured and revealed but not explained, a truth made visible for us to see, feel and puzzle out as well.

a striking painting dominated by blacks, reds, gold and white with a yellow accent, the subject squints a little, and her left eye is slightly misaligned. Yet we don't perceive it as a weakness. Instead we are confronted by the force of her personality and expression. She knows who she is and flaunts it, yet she remains an enigma that challenges us. Ironic clues, such as the suggestion of an icon-like halo, reinforce the mystery.

"I always need something a little off to pique my interest," Ibach said. "When I come across someone with a marker that sets them apart, something a little off, I find it more attractive."

Other paintings project a serene, reflective mood, such as the lovely *Girl with Blue Dress*, or *Interior 1* and *2*. The latter two, Ibach said, came from her memory. They exemplify an approach in which she works more intuitively, responding to a definite mood in herself as she paints.

Ibach also does tiny, intimate portraits. Her *Guys I Know* are detailed and vivid, while her *Head & Shoulders Series* has a more suggestive quality.

For her landscapes, Ibach resorts to mostly black-and-white monotypes printed from Plexiglas plates, created from memory. Ibach grew up in Eugene and her rural Oregon landscapes are brooding, wintry, atmospheric, marked by the presence of water from rivers, ocean and rain.

Although Ibach started painting recently, her mature, striking voice resonates with original strength. Don't miss her work.

Part II of this review featuring Marchini's work will appear next week. **EW**



Girl with Cat, oil painting by Kris Ibach

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