

MONSTERS FAR AWAY AND CLOSE TO HOME

Though missing the mark, *Colossal* remains an intriguing failure of a film

Acarousing alcoholic with a tendency toward blackout, Gloria (the excellent Anne Hathaway) saunters home at sunrise one morning to find that her boyfriend, Tim (Dan Stevens), has packed her bags. Game over: It's time for this girl — and her lies, lame excuses and generally bad behavior — to go. Goodbye New York, farewell failed writing career and hello Midwest hometown, where Gloria, tail between her legs, shacks up in a vacant rental owned by her conspicuously absent parents.

Serendipitously (perhaps), Gloria runs into Oscar (Jason Sudeikis, also excellent), her friend from elementary school who now owns the revamped tavern he inherited from his father. Oscar gives Gloria a job, and the two spend late nights drinking. Romantic tensions ensue, fueled by loneliness, desperation and a hazy nostalgia for the past.

Meanwhile, in the South Korean capital of Seoul, a giant reptile — a gargantuan Godzilla-like beast with a tape-wormy head — has been appearing, wreaking havoc and then disappearing at irregular intervals. Gloria, shaking



off a hangover, realizes that the random appearances and quirky movements of the monster are tied, like some supernatural marionette, to her walks through the same playground she frequented as a kid. She is the monster, literally and figuratively.

Written and directed by Nacho Vigalondo, *Colossal* is a well-made, well-acted film that so nearly hits its mark you can almost forgive the failure of its flat final act. The premise is sheer genius — so rich in potential that the first half of the movie is carried along on a fizzy, giddy wave of intellectual suspense. Who has not wondered at the rippling, unanticipated hurt our bad acts cause to vibrate outward through space and time?

The metaphors here abound and, for a while, Vigalondo teases them out with thrilling tact: Is Gloria's vicarious behemoth a tragicomic comment on the untold destruction left in the wake of alcoholism? Or perhaps a nifty analogy

about the ways our personal privilege is complicit in the purgatory created across the globe — a kind of geopolitical Butterfly Effect that personalizes the apocalyptic guilt of all those Godzilla movies from the nuclear '50s?

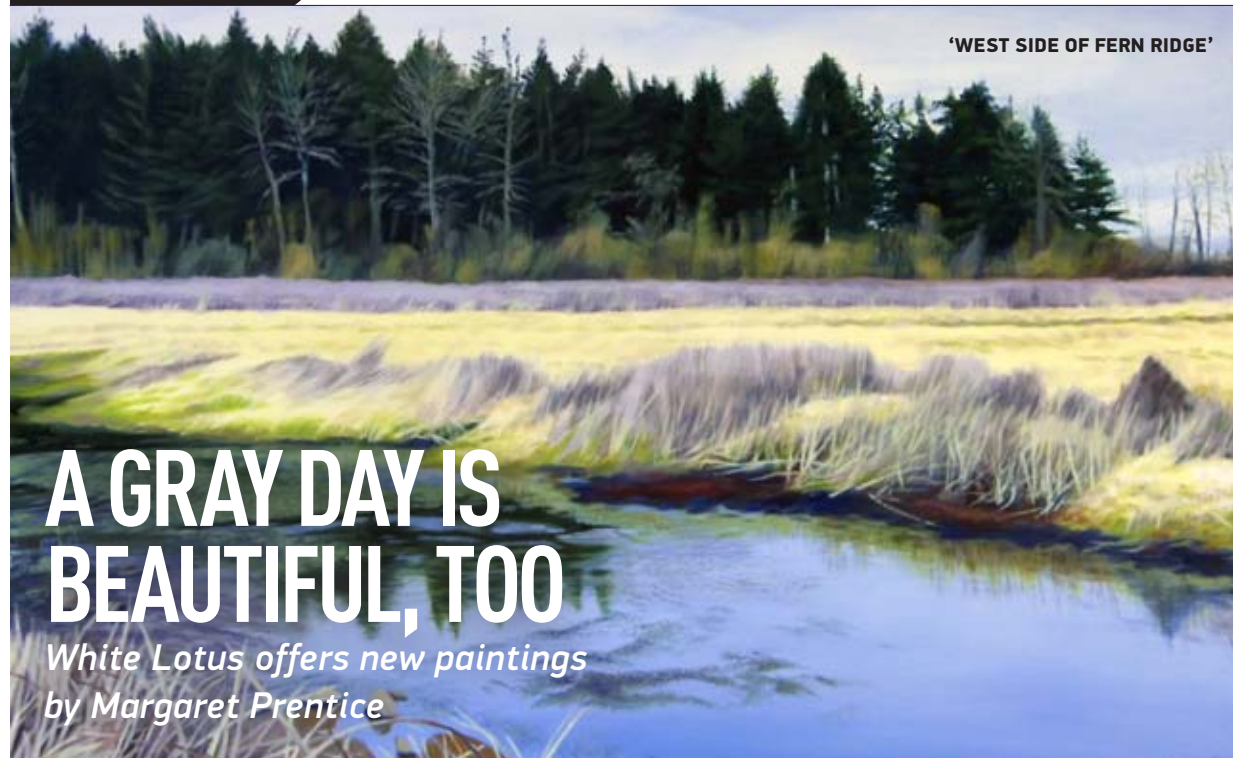
It could be argued that digging out the metaphors that do or do not fuel a movie is simply an act of subjective masturbation — an analytical eye-of-the-beholder type thing — but in the case of *Colossal*, such things matter, and they matter implicitly. The epic threat and dark mystery that are kicked into motion by the appearance of the colossus is, in the final act, slammed shut in the most pedestrian way with a concluding battle royal that, ironically, is so predictable and so narcissistically meepy that it actually beggars belief.

It is impossible to believe that a person who, upon learning that her walks through a playground unleash monstrous death and destruction on the other side of the world, would not (one) consider suicide or (two) simply stop walking through said playground. That this film, otherwise so exquisitely made, fails to take these existential questions into account is exactly what leads it, with queasy inevitability, to the false catharsis of its ending — a bit of bad faith that undermines everything by revealing the molehill that made the mountain.

So the question remains: Is *Colossal* worth seeing? Absolutely, yes. My disappointment in the film is precisely proportional to the originality of its conceit and the way it soars forth with so much early promise. That the movie eventually crashes, and in such a piddling Hollywood way, is part and parcel of the riskiness of art, which fails far more often than it succeeds. The failure here is one of nerve: The film's vision of guilt and violence comes back and bites it in the ass, like a playground dispute that sacrifices an entire city in an empty gesture of revenge. (*Broadway Metro*) ■

VISUAL ARTS

BY ESTER BARKAI



A GRAY DAY IS BEAUTIFUL, TOO

White Lotus offers new paintings by Margaret Prentice

Some people look forward to retirement. They plan for the time when they can stop working and do nothing but take it easy and relax.

Artists aren't usually among those people. Take Picasso, for example: He lived to 91 and famously worked through his later years. Or consider Georgia O'Keeffe, who lived to be almost 100 years old. When her eyesight failed, she switched from painting to sculpture so she could keep working.

Artists want to keep on making art.

This holds true for Margaret Prentice. Not only is she still making art after having retired from her job as art professor at the University of Oregon, she is doing something new.

Prentice was a printmaker during her days as an art professor. She worked in an abstract style and from her imagination. It wasn't until after she retired that she began

to paint what she saw in life. At first she worked small, painting still lifes just to amuse herself.

It was when she switched to a larger format that she got serious about painting.

Prentice's landscape oil paintings, which you can see in a new exhibit at White Lotus Gallery downtown, are inspired by the outdoors, but she prefers to work inside. *Plein air* artists traditionally work small so they might have time to finish an entire painting in one day while working outside. Prentice, whose paintings in this show are larger, compares *plein air* painting to a sport where timing is crucial — as are making quick decisions and moving to the right spot.

She doesn't want to make snap decisions. Prentice says she likes to take her time walking through a place she's visited in nature, keeping a lookout for compositions, taking photographs and then going back to her studio to decide which view she wants to paint, and how.

Because her landscape paintings feature water as a subject, you may be tempted to compare them to the work of the late 19th- and early 20th-century Impressionists. Prentice does lay down some of her subject with identifiable brushstrokes, as did the Impressionists, but she doesn't want to distract the viewer with paint so thick it would remind us that we are looking at a painting. As often as not, she blends her strokes. Her goal is to create the atmosphere of a place and to draw you in.

Composition plays an important part in that effort. For example, her painting *West Side of Fern Ridge* is a landscape composed of triangles vertically stacked. The triangular design takes you into the space and moves you through grass, water, field, trees and the sky.

Winters in Eugene aren't brutal — not the way they are back east or in other parts of the country. But in my experience, it does rain nearly every day here during winter. So as it gets closer to spring, and the breaks in weather become more frequent, you see people hurry out to garden or golf, walk or run (well, rain doesn't always stop most from running in Eugene).

There's a certain excitement in the air that accompanies a change in weather. It's that excitement which Prentice aims to convey with her landscape paintings. She'd like us to feel the change in atmosphere that comes with different seasons.

She started painting the majority of the work that's up at White Lotus Gallery this past summer. Walking around the gallery looking at the different landscapes, moving through the seasons, you may recognize some of the places represented. They are mostly paintings of wetland areas in and around Eugene: Delta Ponds, in town; the Finley National Wildlife Refuge, near Corvallis; and the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area, just west of Eugene.

Would Prentice want every day in Eugene to be sunny? Not really, she says. She enjoys painting stormy days in winter as well as summer days with blue skies.

"There are beautiful things about a gray day, too," Prentice says. ■

Margaret Prentice's Wetlands exhibit is showing at White Lotus Gallery, 767 Willamette Street, through May 20.