

Works by Fox Reflect the Essence of Abstraction

by Eric Ernst

Southampton Press, July 28, 2005



There are few artists working today who have mastered the balance between abstraction and figuration as well as Connie Fox, currently featured in an exhibition at the Pamela Williams Gallery in Amagansett. Illustrating a profound command of rhythm and movement, her most impressive gift is in her ability to combine the two to create images fraught with emotion that are memorably expressive of the sentient power of pure form.

At the same time, her understanding of the importance of maintaining an equilibrium between color and contour allows their rhythmic qualities to avoid becoming overly predictable, thereby conjuring a sense of mystery and ambiguity that continually pervades the works. They reflect, in the words of Joan Miro, “a motionless movement, something equivalent to what is called the eloquence of silence.”

This is not necessarily, however, a silence that implies a lack of confrontational juxtaposition of imagery within the works. Fabricating a relational structure that is stripped bare of pretense but still fraught with a refined sense of elegance, the artist makes the viewer aware less of the exterior of her objects than their conceptual framework, the essence of the images themselves.

As A result, one becomes powerfully cognizant of the creative interplay that is apparent in Ms. Fox’s use of both motion and stillness to create an assertively rhythmic fluidity. This is influenced by her use of both conscious and unconscious placement of forms, which is rarely gentle but, at the same time, avoids being cacophonous or visually abrasive. Demanding contemplation, the works are reminiscent of a form of visual poetry wherein the swirling and painterly cadences combine to create an art stripped completely bare of affectation.

Ms. Fox is able to accomplish this by creating an intriguingly implied narrative that is hinted at through her use of figurative imagery but which is never made obvious or overt. Instead, balanced by her understanding and application of principles of asymmetry and non-objectivity, she invites the viewer to interpret and respond to her use of imagery in extremely personal and individual terms.

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The paintings eloquently reflect the essence of abstraction, which requires an intellectual interaction between the object and the audience. As the painter Svante Rydberg once noted, abstract art “requires something of the viewer. It demands contemplation, study, flights of fancy, and feeling.”

This is most apparent in “Target” (acrylic on canvas, 1990-2005) which energetically mixes a rigid geometric imagery with swirling brushstrokes to create a symphonic effect that is, by turns, brassy and restrained. This is highlighted by her use of structural components that are drawn from surprisingly disparate artistic traditions that veer from expressionism to the post-Bolshevik Russian avant-garde.

These elements are further enhanced by her adept contrast of both color and black and white regions of the canvas which, paradoxically, serves to flatten the composition even as it emphasizes the surging and pulsating planes into which the work recedes.

In another painting, “Marcel’s Star (You Don’t Have to be a Star, Baby To Be in My Show)” (acrylic on canvas, 1993) Ms. Fox features an aggressively manipulated foreground of coloration and impasto applications of paint that is dominated by her use of scientific perspective in the upper left region of the canvas. Because the artist seems to have cut away a portion of the canvas to reveal a world within, the viewer is drawn deep into the composition even as the foreground churns with a dynamically understated intensity.

Making reference in its title to an event when the surrealist Marcel Duchamp attended a party after first shaving the imprint of a star on his skull, the work is particularly memorable in its atmospheric tension and strangely hypnotic juxtaposition of colors and textures.

This is a theme that is even more pronounced in her recent work, which even more immediately relies on the subtle interrelationships between patterns, brush strokes, and coloration such as in “Squared Up” (acrylic on canvas, 2005) and “Engine” (acrylic on canvas, 2005).

The exhibition of the paintings of Connie Fox continues at the Pamela Wilson gallery in Amagansett through August 14.