



janheatonstudio

news

Jan Heaton: New Watercolors
Wally Workman Gallery, through July 31

Watercolor has long been the dabbler's favorite medium, but when a true artistic talent feels at home with (usually) light paints and the unexpectedness of water on paper, the results are stirring. So it is with Jan Heaton's lovely paintings on display at her second solo exhibition at the Wally Workman Gallery. Works of various sizes, most grouped together in series (Ascension, Pond, Grass, and so on), catch the eye and the imagination. Heaton offers that her current focus is on examining "color, structure, pattern, and form as found in nature," and with nature as her guide, she's created an array of pieces that share a liveliness and energy of their subjects.

It's a small work, but tucked at the back, in a corner, is *Berries I*, and there is something simply delightful about it framed. Unmatted in a plain frame, swirls of colors evoke an assortment of sorbet-colored fruit: looping forms and piled, sherbet circles jostle for attention.

The *Poinsettia* series includes a small matted quartet in more somber tones of those fresh sorbet colors. On backgrounds of flames or intertwined circles in light greens and yellows, blotches of thick plum reds saturate the paper singularly, or in twos or more, with several specific touches of color to control the movement for a moment, stopping the eye before the gentle energy demands further exploration of the paper.

If one needed a setting for the *Ascension* series, it would be outdoors, where sudden wistful bursts of swirling breezes send up fragments of color at the approach of night; of fireflies and grasses jostling for space in a rising, circuitous dance. As with all the works in this exhibit, the *Ascension* series offers a gentle, playful sense of motion, but the palette this time introduces cooler colors with explosions that saturate detail. Juxtaposed against the cool *Ascension* series, the *Summer's End* and *Austin Summer* series offer warmth and high energy, occasionally approaching smoldering heat. These are hot afternoon images; the *Ascension* paintings, in flat metal frames, reveal a settling, moody, even dramatic dusk.

Simpler in its subdued palette than the *Ascension* series, the *Cacti* series offers a more experimental – hinting at haphazard or random – approach to its swirls of greens on yellow fields, which give the appearance of having been superimposed on what are actually small areas of midnight blue. Here Heaton has allowed the liquid medium to help dictate form – washed-out swaths of yellow and blobs of blue populate *Cacti I*; small dollops of blue anchor the playful swirls of yellows and greens in *Cacti II*; and in *Cacti V*, Heaton brushes those wet blues into feathery outlines of distinctly cactuslike shapes.

There are many unmounted works that explore shape and color with more evident formality. Yet the energy flows among the small and large unnamed watercolors. Heaton's sorbet palette arches gracefully in one fine work; it is used in pulsing, blossomlike bundles in another; and it seems to shine from a bouquet in yet another.

Among the larger works are those of the *Water Strata* series – delicate emanations of light, earthy green on canvases with hardly any watercolors on them. Heaton's delicate shapes evoke lily pads or leaves in gentle movement across the paper. Bolder, larger works, *Pink VI* and *Pink VII*, once again benefit from the wetness of the colors to create form. Vibrant pinks and saturate yellows work with vivid olives to soak the paper, fanning out – or floating out – like bubbles rising to the surface of thick, clear liquid. Similarly vibrant is the *Pond* series – not all mounted – with shapes of lilies in those bold, bright sorbet colors: pink, orange, raspberry bustling on the canvases over hints of yellow and green, or arrayed in more ordered fashion, yet never relinquishing that pleasant jostling dance that makes all of Heaton's works so engaging.

Robi Polgar, The Austin Chronicle

Reference: July 23, 2004

