

Soft-Spoken but Powerful

Written by Johanna Welzenbach-Hilliard
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Pat Edwards is a small, soft-spoken woman, and her oil paintings are also small and soft-spoken. However, there is a quiet power in her person and in her work. The Catich Gallery at St. Ambrose University is currently featuring *Here and There*, an exhibit of her paintings that will be on display through April 22.

A resident of Iowa City, Edwards' realistic still-life paintings are of places in her own neighborhood. She works from photographs she has taken because she finds it almost impossible to "paint on-site" without being interrupted by passers-by.

She is drawn to ordinary, everyday subjects for her work, such as people's backyards, quiet tree-lined streets, and houses. She says of these subjects: "I paint until, in an odd way I can't explain, I own that place."

The viewer, if open-minded, can also feel a sense of ownership, or perhaps belonging, in her skillfully executed oil paintings. *Light on Driveway* looks like a courtyard bathed in afternoon sunlight. The wooden fence next to the house reminds me of a small European village where houses are both connected and separated by these fences. Despite its obvious privacy, I want to step into the drive and soak up the sun's warmth.

Edwards' excellent use of composition draws one into her paintings with great immediacy. In *Trees on Clark*

, the observer's eye follows the sidewalk, the central source of light in the picture, to the much darker overhanging trees in the background. From a distance the painting is very detailed. Up close one can see the continuous swirls and loops of her small brushstrokes and dabs of dark green paint for the leaves.

In *Edith's Backyard*, Edwards uses the yard's small winding pathway as the center of the painting, giving only a glimpse of the houses on either side and just half of the garden furniture. It's a painting about nothing in particular, but the overall sense is one of peacefulness and a comfortable familiarity with this setting. The contrasting colors and light help to give it that mood.

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The softness in Edwards' paintings comes from her use of soft colors: various hues of green (moss, gray-green, forest, dark), gold (russet, pale, warm, yellow), and brown. The power in her paintings comes from her assertive use of light and shading. The light is uplifting and the dark is brooding.

She uses this contrast for a dramatic effect in *Toward a Spit*. The dark trees look menacing as their branches are tossed in the wind, and the river looks white and choppy, but there is a pale light in the sky giving a sense of relief from the threatening weather. I felt a serenity in this painting, even as I felt its foreboding.

As a departure from her landscapes, Edwards also has on display a series of portraits of one subject, Mark, and several other paintings featuring people in their daily surroundings participating in familiar activities: reading, gardening, fishing. I enjoyed these paintings because they show her interest in people as well as in her physical environment. She has been painting portraits since she was 12.

Mood is a central theme in these paintings, also. The four faces of Mark express four different states of mind. Number five, simply entitled *Mark*, is sad. *Mark as Pascal* is thoughtful – perhaps a great mind at work? In

After Frans Hals

, Mark just looks happy, and in

Puck

, he is as bemused and impish as the name would imply.

Edwards uses her same swirling, dabbing brushstrokes in these paintings, giving them depth and texture. The subject's face is lit up with pinks and whites, but he wears a black T-shirt, thus enabling the artist to use her contrasting light-and-dark technique in her portraits, as well.