

## Magical Meditations: Shelly Voss, through January 19 at Leger Gallery

Written by Bruce Carter

Wednesday, 13 December 2006 02:41

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Most of us remember our grade-school art classes, in which we cut up construction paper or magazine photographs and glued them together to make a collage. Few of us thought then that we were making art, for it seemed so much fun.

But this personal and beautiful medium is full of expressive possibilities that can reveal the artist's most intimate thoughts and feelings. On December 16, regionally known artist and calligrapher Shelly Voss opens a retrospective exhibit of her magical collage meditations. The reception runs from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Leger Gallery in downtown Davenport, and the exhibit will be up through January 19.

Beginning with a single piece of textured or colored paper that has caught her attention, she glues and arranges more decorated papers from her large supply, applies relief-printed forms, inserts occasional lines with a technical pen, adds deliberate brush marks, and intensifies areas with ink washes or narrow strips of paper. Her colors are either vibrant and bright, or muted earth tones. Every composition is balanced perfectly.

Her generally small and ethereal images include doors, flowing curtains, a stage of overlapping screens, distant landscapes, the sky at dusk, a solitary figure, birds in space, and a turquoise ocean beach with transparent waves. Her subjects, she says, "are the things we aren't sure of, that we can't quite put into words - the filtered ideas of the invisible worlds."

Voss' intriguing mystical worlds are full of veiled images, expressed in layers of form, which flow out her unconscious mind the way paint flows out of a brush. The effect is quiet, personal,

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and meditative.



In the paper collage *Sage Passages*, 13 vertical stripes of beautiful paper - a dusty rose green, a deep rich purple, a textured sage, and a soft ochre khaki, all of various widths - form elegant and mysterious columns across a shallow space. Her piece evokes a searching mood from her color relationships, with surprising harmonies. Her impressions emerge and disappear again behind another column of color, the way one melody can fade behind another wall of sound. Her spirit is open to the unknown and the revealed.

In the award-winning and mysterious *As the Crow Flies*, a gridded two-part paper map of blues and grays with black marbled swirls gives the feeling of an ancient chart to an unfamiliar island in an ocean of pink waves. Four gilded birds fly over the land, and six crows line up on the side as warning or counsel.

This is an intuitive map; little is specific or logical. But the mood of the whole is strangely calming and contemplative because of her sensitive use of color.

At the front of the gallery, we see four recent, small monotypes. A typical monotype is a single image, drawn with ink or paint on metal or Plexiglas and transferred onto paper by means of a press, roller, or a wooden spoon. Instead, Shelly has brushed sepia ink onto sumi paper and then laid this onto a buff Stonehenge paper, and pressed softly with her hands. The result is both controlled and accidental, as a bamboo brush allows chance to enter each stroke. The images are floating Mark Rothko-like luminous rectangles of soft browns and dark grays, with occasional columns, watery backgrounds, deliberate lines, and clean curves of subtly colored paper. The arrangements describe a mood of calm internal observation, of experimentation, of discovery.

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During our conversation while Shelly was hanging her show, she said, "I work to find out what I'm saying, discovering the meaning after I have finished or until the materials tell me. My voice needs to come out of me, and like a piano player, I can't make music until I'm playing." Her reliance on her process for making and finishing her work shows a high degree of inner complexity and her own acceptance of ambiguity.

In the charming paper collage *Sun, Sea, & Sand*, a brilliant orange-yellow strip in the sky fades into a turquoise land with a transparent beige beach with white foam waves. In the lovely *Seaside*, a variously hued turquoise sky and land are striped with yellow paper, and punctuated with two little beach-house forms near the water. In the larger collage *Tabula Rosa*

, softly pink-tinted, hand-cast papers form islands passed over by pink and bronze and turquoise strips of paper, all floating on sea-green paper water. These images seem like resting places, almost small vacations, on an otherwise intense inner journey.

Her four monoprint collages, *Atmosphere Documents*, hang quietly, purring like still cats. The images of soft squares and planes are made with brown printed sumi paper glued onto light-beige ink-tinted paper, and lightly nuanced with brushed dark ink. The forms illustrate growth and ascension upward and deep into space, seen as steps or layers. Some are transparent, and others are dark barriers with leafless trees and distant stormy skies. Her layered ethereal landscapes combine quietly into distant panoramas as viewed from a high hill.

For Voss, to reproduce the visible is not enough. The artist must be in a Jungian contact with something more, which carries her art to a deeper level of self-understanding. Their power comes from the artist's sensibilities, from looking inward to find patterns and insights from her experiences. Her art describes a visual journey, deeply felt from within. An understanding and perceptive audience will find them absorbing and beautiful, allowing for repeated viewing.

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*Leger Gallery is located at 228 West Third Street in downtown Davenport. For more information, call (309) 716-1087.*