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Art Drips Like Wine At Tania Dibbs' Big Sky Studio

By Drew Stofflet Mar 3, 2011

I spent three years surrounded by the art of Tania Dibbs while working in a local restaurant, always amazed in the way she captured the stunning land and skylscapes of our surrounding environs. Even more, I was captivated by the magical subtleties of luminescence radiating from her work, and how they seemed to always be changing.

The same can be said for the artist herself, as she has evolved beyond the master of land and sky — through which she became internationally known — to her current status as a true modern, abstract expressionist.

I caught up with Tania last week at her annual art and wine party in her very own Big Sky Studio on the Hyman Avenue Mall. She opened her doors in 2008, and has remained one of the few authentic local artist producing and showing works in Aspen. On this night, the gallery was glowing and the wine was flowing. For in Tania's colorful space, art literally drips like wine in color, texture and fluidity. The painting entitled "Drips" evokes the dark gray, heather and purple mystery of Bordeaux; it appears as if red wine is being poured from the sky on a stormy, foggy day during harvest season. Another, called "Runaway," with its lavish, electric gold and yellow, is like the famous semillion and sauvignon blanc wines of the Entre-Deux-Mers district also in Bordeaux. If you have ever enjoyed a Sauternes (Chateau D'Yquem anyone?), looking at this painting, which resembles the French countryside on a dazzling summer day, will bring you back to those sips. And the painting "Under The Lens" looks as if it is were an actual golden table linen after a dinner party serving copious amounts of aged red Burgundy.

Through Dibbs' evolving techniques of the application of gold leaf and drip painting, transparent layers create dazzling, brilliant light, while color pools on the paintings like wine on a hard surface or a starched linen. This layering allows the eye of the beholder to look deeper, and abstract, universal images like blurred land, water and skies offer a gentle guide. Much like tasting wine, curious ambiguity becomes familiar as we question what our senses perceive.

Dibbs' evolution toward modern abstract expression follows in the steps of the heady and brooding artists working in New York during the second World War, like Jackson Pollock and his wife Lee Krasner, Mark Rothko, William DeKoonig and her noted influence Martin Resnick. A painting entitled "Milton's Field" graces the front door, full of heavy impasto-type textures and vivid brush strokes. She mentions musician/artist Joni Mitchell's "scratching" style and Pollock's dribbling "drip" phase, and adds, "I am a painter. I like to use brushstrokes." To this second style of painting she employs home-cured linseed oil and crushed chalk and marble dust to create her own paints, establishing an artistic terroir, full of both sense of place and geologic minerality inherent in French wines, which these paintings are so reminiscent of.

It was also fitting that for the evening we were tasting a flight of excellent white and red Rhône-style wines from Paso Robles' Rabbit Ridge in California. Beyond the wines themselves, and the stunning art on display, this evening was really about the warmth and love of good friends and community. Dibbs arrived at Anderson Ranch in Snowmass after studying in Italy and New York and has called the Roaring Fork Valley home for the past 20 years. Old friends mingled, shared memories and laughed well into the snowy evening.

I have heard, and pondered, recently, a statement that wall art is dead, in lieu of other, more socially engaging acts of art. At Tania's Big Sky Studio, it is safe to say that wall art is alive and well, and serving a valuable function to this community. I will and did drink to that.

Cheers! Remember, wine reveals truth.

Drew Stofflet lives in Redstone. Correspond with him at drew.stofflet@gmail.com.