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## In Her Own Light

By Christine Benedetti Feb 13, 2009

Dozens of galleries can be found in Aspen's downtown core, yet only one of these is home to a local, working artist.

Sure, her work is on the wall and up for sale, but a little stool sits next to the front window, giving her a view of what's going down on the Hyman Avenue Mall, and pedestrians have the chance to check out an artist at work.

Tania Dibbs has lived in Aspen since the late '80s, working in a variety of "studios," including a makeshift cabin on the banks of the Roaring Fork in which she borrowed electricity from the late Ed Bradley's neighboring home.

But she was recently given the opportunity to lease the space that was formerly Toddy's - a leather store - until the spring. Her exhibit, and time spent there, is called "107 Days," in reference to her duration.

"It will be interesting to see what this looks like in a year or so," she says, looking out the window on 414 E. Hyman Ave. "I may be one of many (local artists' studios). ... I think it would be a good thing, but things may be shifting (with the economy)."

At Highlands, artist Olivia Daane works in her LivAspenArt studio, but it's a rare combination to have both an exhibition space and be able to work there too.

"People love it," says Dibbs. "People can come in and actually feel the energy when I'm having a good day, and they can see how much fun the creation part is. It's like joining a party."

Even though people appreciate art, there can sometimes be a disconnect between the process and the final product. This way, passersbys and potential buyers can actually experience the gritty side.

"It's like chicken and cellophane," she says. "You can go into a gallery, and look at the art, but it's very cleaned up."

### The Art

Dibbs was what she calls a realistic landscape artist. But, like any evolution, both her paintings and methodology have changed.

"I got very bored after just doing it over and over again," says Dibbs. "I worked linearly from start to finish, and would grind away at pieces (in the traditional style) until they were done."

Now, Dibbs has learned to let go a little bit, and that loss of attachment has led to some of her best work yet. She calls it the "death of the ego." Instead of having a plan for a piece, she starts with an idea, some layering of paint, and then goes wherever the paintbrush takes her. Working on several pieces at once isn't troubling anymore, and she's happy to quit and come back later.

"That one on the door is one of my favorites now, but it didn't start that way," she says. "I just kept piling on paint hoping it would get better because I didn't like it, and then all of the sudden it was something really cool. I don't even know if I could do it again that way. ... Sometimes what starts as a failure is later the best thing."

Her paintings have shifted from traditional, Impressionist-like scapes made up of earth tones, into more abstract and modern works composed of cooler tones, like aquas, blues and greens. Her artistic style mirrors the way her process has changed - much looser and more fluid.

### The Space

As a native Virginian, from the suburbs of Washington D.C., Dibbs said she would never have had the opportunity to grow as an artist there. So, like everyone else, she moved here for a winter and never left.

Leapfrogging from space to space, she finally sold enough art to buy a home in Basalt, and subsequently built a working space there as well.

But, her Hyman space - Big Sky Studios - is the first time she's had her own gallery. Parts of her collection hang in galleries in Tennessee, New York and even around Aspen, but this is truly her own space.

"It's fun to have your own work on the walls," she says.

The street-level gallery steps down into a second room, where roughly 10 pieces of art hang on the wall. When she opened in December, much of her repertoire was quickly bought, primarily from people she already knew or with whom she had a business or personal relationships. So, she called back some of her artwork that was hanging in other galleries to fill her own.

"This way, people can see my whole body of work," she says, noting the way her style has changed. "Someone might not think the same person painted this (realistic landscape) and that (modern abstract)."

With an option to extend the lease, Dibbs says she isn't sure about what to do.

"It's human nature to want more," she says. "But, I would have wet my pants with glee years ago to be where I am now."

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