



Evolving Structure

Nature and Spirituality Converge in Rick Stevens' Latest Exhibition

BY CLAUDIA JOSEPH

Rick Stevens' most recent work exhibited by Hunter Kirkland Contemporary explores nature's tenuous vacillation between structure and amorphous forms. Inspired by the constant flux of natural shapes, Stevens creates abstract works of art in oil on linen and pastel on paper. In his new show "Evolving Structure", Stevens opens himself up to nature's multi-faceted dimensions, from the microscopic to the cosmic—perceiving an intelligence or unifying force behind it all.

During the past 25 years Stevens' painting has evolved into vivid abstractions. "While the shapes in my work may come from observing nature, they may also take on symbolic implications. A line can symbolize man's need for structure. The spotted patterns and dancing dots permeating throughout express the life affirming human spirit that refuses to be constricted by barriers."

Stevens' latest paintings cannot help but be informed by his attraction to nature, and he allows the abstract expressions to come forth in an organic and unstructured way, likening his creative process to jazz improvisation. "When I become predictable I get bored. I need the challenge of unknown territory." With lyrical spacing and harmonies of color it's easy to find parallels to music in his paintings.

The patterns in his compositions are often compared to Gustav Klimt. Stevens readily confirms that he is under his influence as well as Bonnard, Degas, the landscape painter George Inness, and abstract expressionists like Hans Hoffman and Joan Mitchell. "Studying other painters guides my work as much as observing nature. Painting is, after all, a form of communication that is built upon what others have achieved."

Nature's influence is evident in Stevens' *Floating and Dreaming*, as he demonstrates his considerable mastery of oils to create a work that is at once luminous, free and intricate. The palate in this particular piece is reminiscent of the water and lush foliage ubiquitous in his native Michigan, imparting a serene sense of place to the viewer. Equally intriguing, yet reflecting a perspective of color more suggestive of a southwestern landscape, *Directional Deflection*, is



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one of Stevens' pastel works included in the upcoming show. In it he proves his adeptness at pastel, borrowing again from nature's inspiration to successfully depict a completely different cadence of light and viewpoint. "As a painter I see light as the unifying element. It illuminates all that we see; it defines the colors, contrast and overall mood of nature. As a landscape painter the critical concern for me has always been not just the subject and composition, but choosing the light to portray it in."

Comparing these two pieces, Stevens' range is apparent. These works encapsulate Stevens' ability to portray two vastly different natural settings in the abstract realm with aplomb. This latest exhibition promises to showcase Stevens' sophisticated techniques and notable talent. ■

OPPOSITE PAGE: *Floating and Dreaming*, medium?, 47" × 47"; THIS PAGE: *Directional Deflection*, medium?, 60" × 60".

Rick Stevens' exhibit, "Evolving Structure" runs from October 5th to October 22nd at the Hunter Kirkland Contemporary gallery at 200-B Canyon Road with an opening reception on October 5th from 5:00-7:00p.m.