

Painter's colorful oils comfortably surreal

By LORA MAHAFFEY
Daily News correspondent
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The Center for Contemporary Visual Art of Alaska has a summer show that is definitely worth the trouble of finding downtown parking. Many mature and full-bodied Alaska artists are present, but one painter deserves special note.

Linda Infante-Lyons is unique in our neck of the woods. Her juicy, color-saturated paintings live and dream in a world of Daliesque proportions. They are pensive, surreal and slightly unsettling in that the plants and animals she paints appear sentient. The glowing colors, the fantastical plants that are so biologically precise, the animals gazing pensively out at the observer beg the question, "Who is watching whom?"

There is a bit of a dark side to her work, as some of the plant life looks as if it might take a bite out of you. The painting "Cerro Dragon," the largest of her canvasses in the display, depicts a section of graceful, delicate branches and striking burgundy flower pods on a ground of rich amber. It was inspired by red mangrove trees she saw on a recent trip to the Galapagos Islands. There is a bird in the painting, and one is not quite sure if the bird will make a meal of the flowers or vice versa.

Infante-Lyons was raised in Anchorage and earned a bachelor's degree in biology at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Wash. She later attended the Vina del Mar School of Fine Arts in Chile, where she has spent most of her adult life. You can see the influence of South America in her paintings.

Her work has been compared to that of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, and there are similarities in the use of vibrant color and in some of the subject matter as both women have painted wonderful self-portraits.

But Kahlo's work is deliberately, frankly disturbing and at times heartbreaking, the result of struggling with much physical and emotional pain. Her color choices and prevalent use of red are meant to be jarring and to elicit a gut reaction.

On the other hand, Infante-Lyons' use of color and subject matter evokes a sense of balance and steadiness. You see the influence of surrealism in her paintings, in the broad, flat use of color and in the composition of her subjects. She also has an eye for detail and a mastery of her medium, particularly her ease with oil paints and very fine brush technique. There is a deceptive comfort about her paintings that one does not feel with Kahlo's.

The painting "Alfonsina (vestida del mar)" was inspired by the late Argentinean poet Alfonsina Storni. She wrote many poems about the sea and eventually ended her life by walking into it. The painting presents a calm and placid view of a woman wading into the ocean. The colors are restful and soothing, the subject looks like she is just going for a swim; but once again, there is that ever-present darkness and subtle depth of feeling.

In this and her accompanying work, the artist has used her experience to create an individual voice, one that makes you pause and contemplate the work, react how you will.

Lora Mahaffey has studied art at several institutions, including manuscript restoration under private tutelage at Trinity College in Dublin, art history and graphics at Glasgow School of Art and applied arts at Roehampton Institute in London.

ANOTHER OPINION

Most unique and freshly rendered are the works that depict the thick and lush plant life of Chile. ... With the thick contours, curving forms and repeated forms, these plant portraits appear distinctly styled yet botanically correct.

The strength of Infante-Lyons' work is in her vivid and carefully balanced use of color. The paintings of this nostalgic garden are highly entertaining, extremely vibrant yet still realistically colored.

-- Andy Nau, reviewing Infante-Lyons' exhibit "Jardin de la Nostalgia" at Alaska Pacific University on Dec. 12, 1999.



"View From Here II" is among works by Anchorage artist Linda Infante-Lyons on display in the Center for Contemporary Visual Art of Alaska's summer show. ()



The gentle surrealism of Linda Infante-Lyons' work is evident in "Brote." The artist studied in Chile and has spent most of her adult life there. ()

LINDA INFANTE-LYONS is among several artists whose works are featured in the Summer Invitational Exhibition on display through July 30 at the Center for Contemporary Visual Art of Alaska, 621 W. Sixth Ave., on the southwest side of the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts. Hours: noon-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Call 272-1489.

OTHERS IN THE EXHIBITION INCLUDE: Alvin Amason, Kim Brown, Carol Crump Bryner, Randall Carlson, Gregory M. Carr, Susan Condon, Wendy Croskrey, Graham Dane, Mark Daughhetee, Don and Julie Decker, Ken DeRoux, Rachelle Dowdy, Lisa Gray, Stephen Gray, Esther Hong, John Hoover, Matt Johnson, Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Garry Kaulitz, Andy Kirsch, Kay Marshall, Scott McDonald, Hugh McPeck, Don Mohr, Marcello Munoz, Richard Murphy, Bill Noe, James Orvik, Alex Phillips, David Rosenthal, Wanda Seamster, Ron Senungetuk, Sandy Stolle, Jane Terzis, Kat Tomka, Kesler Woodward, Myron Wright and Sheila Wyne.

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