



The works of Klementovich in the center; Pryor on either side.

Artist Journeys

Painting unseen energy: color truth with Rebecca Klementovich and Janis Pryor

By Cynthia Melendy

We are just beginning to spy subtle shifts in color, light and sounds which herald the wind-down of summer. The light starts later and ends sooner. Many flowers have gone to seed and berry, beginning to ripen in the wine-scented air. Crickets sing lullabies.

Of course these are the visible signs of seasonal energy change. Experience has taught us just what it is that is happening, and we know what is to come. Sometimes we don't understand at first glance what these visible and invisible things mean. Similarly, Rebecca Klementovich and Janis Pryor have experimented with how color and medium express the 'unseen'—that is, for example, emotion or intellect, at their exhibition "Painting Unseen Energy", or "Color Truths".

On her website, Rebecca explains the exhibition thus:

"I am lucky enough to be having a private show with my good friend and color maverick, Janis Pryor. It is true we both live in God's country, among the small remote towns that speckle the foothills of the mountains. We both strangely have this love of the obscure French painter, De Stael. As strange

circumstances always make the best partners in the art, Janis and I have joined forces to show our Abstracts together this summer at M and D playhouse, in North Conway."

Janis Pryor has been making art since she was five. Her formal studies began at the age of thirteen. She was accepted to the High School of Music & Art in New York City, and became an art major focusing on painting and architecture at Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont. She spent roughly thirty years helping "change the world" through professional employment in politics and media. Three years ago she returned to her first loves, the visual arts and writing. She teaches "Drawing From Within" at Living From Within, the holistic health center located in Conway.

Shortly after Pryor moved to the area, she went to see a show at the Jackson Studio and Art Gallery and discovered the work of Rebecca Klementovich. Pryor was stunned by what she recognized as the influence of deStael in Klementovich's landscapes. Several weeks later Pryor met Klementovich and shrieked with amazement. She never thought she'd find anyone who was familiar with his work. That was the beginning of their friendship and shared journey as artists in Mt. Washington Valley.

Janis says that Color is the subject of her work,

primarily (but not exclusively) articulated by mediums not traditionally associated with abstract work, soft pastels and oil pastels. She believes that artists are problem solvers to one degree or another. Questions such as 'what constitutes the boundaries of beauty?' and 'at what point can you introduce an element of dissonance?' drive her work. She also wonders how the artist can manifest emotion, and stir the viewer through color, without melodrama taking over.

Pryor's work over the years has been influenced by the paintings of Mark Rothko, Jules Olitski, Helen Frankenthaler, Nicolas deStael, Morris Louis, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, the drawings of Rodin, Michelangelo, DaVinci, Gustav Klimt, and the architecture of LeCorbusier, Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, Robert A.M. Stern, Hugh Newell Jacobsen, and Sarah Susanka.

Her work is currently being shown at the Jackson Art Studio and Gallery in Jackson, NH. When we view her work at this exhibition, we do see that color can become a form of visual poetry and transcend the theories that define it.

Rebecca Klementovich has been living in Bartlett,

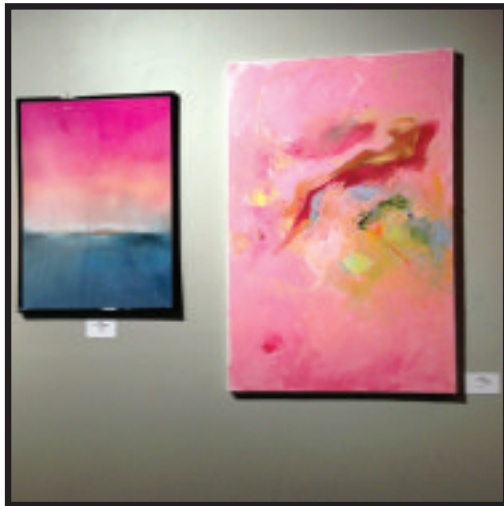
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for several years with her daughter Violet. She graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology NYC, earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1992. She has also studied at the Cooper Union, 1995-1996 and the Students Art League 1998. Her Solo exhibitions included Abstract Paintings, Jackson Art and Gallery, NH (2011), 2010 Retrospective of Klementovich, MWVAA, NH, 2001 Paintings by Klementovich, Brown Dog Studio, Brooklyn, NY. Gallery 13 in Connecticut, and many galleries locally in the Mount Washington Valley and in Maine.

So who is Nicolas deStael, the artist by whom both artists are influenced so strongly? Nicolas de Staël was a painter known for his use of a thick impasto and his highly abstract landscape painting. He also worked with collage, illustration and textiles. No doubt, he was concerned with the same experimental questions that fascinate Klementovich and Pryor.

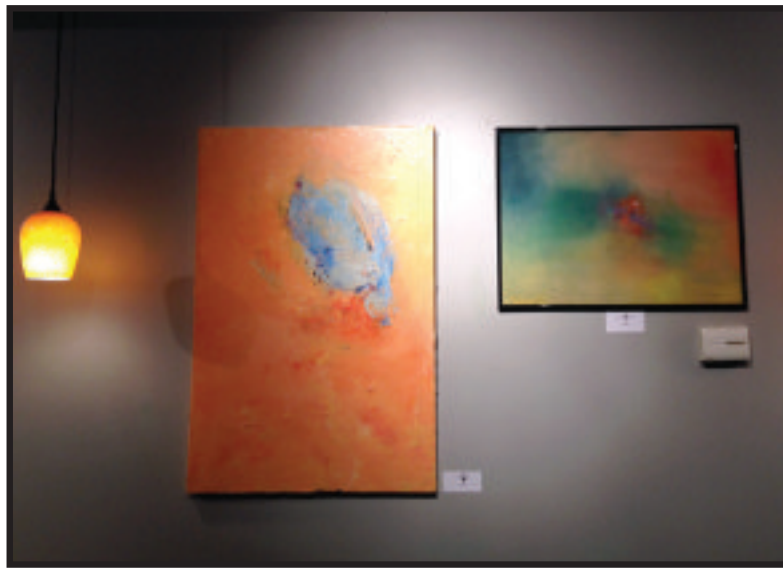
Nicolas de Staël was born Nikolai Vladimirovich Stael von Holstein in the family of a Russian Lieutenant General, Baron Vladimir Stael von Holstein, (a member of the Staël von Holstein family, and the last Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress) and his second wife, Lubov Vladimirovna Berednikova (his first wife was Olga Sakhanskaya). De Staël's family was forced to emigrate to Poland in 1919 because of the Russian Revolution; both his father and stepmother died in Poland and the orphaned Nicolas de Staël was sent with his older sister Marina to Brussels to live with a Russian family (1922).



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References tell us that De Staël's painting career spans roughly 15 years (from 1940) and produced more than a thousand paintings. His work shows the influence of Gustave Courbet, Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso (especially Picasso in his Blue and Rose periods), Georges Braque, Fernand Léger and Chaim Soutine, as well as of the Dutch masters Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hercules Seghers. Gradually beginning in the 1940s, de Staël moved further and further toward abstraction. He evolved his own highly distinctive and abstract style, similar to the near-contemporary American Abstract Expressionist movement, and French Tachisme, but which he developed independently of them. Typically his paintings contained block-like slabs of colour, emerging as if struggling against one another across the surface of the image. Accordingly, when a Rothko painting was paired with one by Nicolas de Staël in the show of young French and American painters, Rothko commented to William Seitz (in 1952): "Blobs vs. blocks. They both begin with 'b.' Comparisons are false!". In fact, according to De Staël himself, he turned to his "abstracting" because he "found it awkward to paint an object as a likeness because of the awkwardness I felt when faced(!) with the infinite multitude of coexisting objects in any single object".

De Staël's work was quickly recognized within the post-war art world, and he became one of the



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most influential artists of the 1950s. His return to imagery during the early 1950s was an influential precedent for the American Bay Area Figurative Movement, when many of those abstract painters made a similar move; returning to imagery during the mid-1950s. His painting style is characterized by a thick impasto showing traces of the brush and the palette knife, and by a division of the canvas into numerous zones of color (especially blues, reds and whites). His most well-known late paintings of beaches and landscapes are dominated by the sky and effects of light.

Much of de Staël's late work, particularly his thinned and diluted oil on canvas abstract landscapes of the mid-1950s, predicts Color field painting and Lyrical Abstraction of the 1960s and 1970s. Nicolas de Staël's bold and intensely vivid color in his last paintings predict the direction of much of contemporary painting that came after him including Pop Art of the 1960s.

The French New Wave filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard has stated that de Stael is his favorite painter, and the use of primary colors in his film *Pierrot Le Fou* was strongly influenced by de Stael's work.

The paintings of both Klementovich and Pryor reflect the influence of de Staël's color field work, and powerfully suggest how abstract painting can effectively transmit ideas, feelings, and dreams. Side by



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experience these inspiring artists as they take us past the rich representational art we normally experience, into a new wonderland.

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side, they illustrate how color alone, regardless of form, can inspire the viewer. Strikingly, they have independently combined and comingled similar colors to create, strikingly, very similar effects.

They pointedly display the futility of comparison when that being compared is not defined by boundaries. These are the 'unseen images' that both artists portray. In this small gallery, a stroll past these women's work transports us into another realm, where not all must be apprehended through the physical, the dimensional, and the bounded. We are fortunate to be able to