

'Monday Painters' Works by seven arts on view in Ridgefield Guild show

By Abby Luby
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An empty canvas can inhibit an artist as a blank page does a writer. Getting started, engaging in and following their creative processes have been among the challenges for the Monday Painters, a group of seven women whose work will be shown at The Ridgefield Guild starting Saturday.

The women, all professional, seasoned artists, work under the tutelage of celebrated painter Benice Horowitz, who artist Gail Lee sought out three years ago to lead the group. Since then, the artists have met at Horowitz's Stamford studio every Monday to learn and grow their art.



Crowd Scene series **Opening Night**
By Benice Horowitz

Lee remembers how impressed she was when she first saw Horowitz's work, an oeuvre that is mostly abstract.

"I called Benice to see more of her work and then asked her if she would teach a class."

Horowitz told Lee if she could get the people, she would teach the class.

"I got artists I most admired to form the class," says Lee. Three years later, most of the original Monday painters are still in the class - Roz Emmons, Susan Frey, Angie O'Brien, Virginia Bates, Sally Aldrich and Gail Lee.

The artists are energized by Horowitz's class, says Lee. "The minute you arrive, there's such a good energy. We have a brief talk. She puts a lot of thought into teaching the class - it seems tailored just for us."

Horowitz encourages the artists to immerse themselves in the process, tap into their intuition and forget about the results.

"What I try to do is to make the painters express their own personalities," explains Horowitz. "I also don't impart my own views, but try to bring out what is naturally theirs." The approach works especially well with the Monday Painters because of their different backgrounds, which include photography, graphic design, pottery, sculpture and drawing.

Horowitz uses unconventional teaching techniques such as drawing with eyes closed, or with the left hand if the artist is right-handed.

Inspired by an article she read in *The Advocate* some time ago about a composer who needed silence to "hear" music he would write, Horowitz connected silence with the negative space in art and used the concept as a theme for a series of classes. She had the women work on a piece in black and white and shades of grey with mixed media to create positive spaces followed by a second piece that pulled the negative spaces from the first.

Aldrich, past president of the Katonah (N.Y.) Museum Artists Association and former head of the Pleasantville (N.Y.) High School Art Department, had been away from painting for a decade and wanted to get back to it. She remembers the day Horowitz put on some music and told the women to paint with their eyes closed.

"It just let your hand roam over the paper to get you in that intuitive mood," says Aldrich. "The music was totally 'loosening' and with your eyes closed you respond."

When Aldrich opened her eyes and saw the start of a painting, she knew exactly what to do next. "It was a little piece of a painting that starts to talk to you."

Frey joined Horowitz's class about a year ago. Frey, a Stamford Art Association board member, praises the class for highlighting the individual artist and producing a plethora of diverse work.

"We are not all painting the same still life or landscape," says Frey. "We are doing some version of abstractions and it's amazing what people come up with. Usually I just stand at the canvas and let it fly."

Emmons, a founding member of the Darien Art Center, says the Monday class is inspiring. "Benice knows how to free up everybody. That's the real pursuit of most artists - to let themselves go. It's not easy painting abstractly. It's the hardest thing but most people don't see that."

The women are comfortable enough to openly discuss each other's work and look to Horowitz for feedback, says Lee.

"You get inspired by what other people are doing - it's contagious in there. Also, Benice is so wonderful and open-minded when critiquing the work."

Horowitz has found that her Monday painters are receptive and motivated. "They are a bunch of the most wonderful people and the atmosphere is also wonderful. These women want to learn as much as possible and there's no competition."

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"Monday painters" runs Jan. 5 to 20 at The Ridgefield Guild, 34 Halpin Lane. An opening reception is Jan. 5. noon to 4 p.m. with a snow date of Sunday, Jan. 6. Call 438-8863.

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