

Wolf Kahn, Emily Mason exhibit in Norwalk

Abby Luby, Correspondent

Published: Friday, April 2, 2010

Seen side by side, works by contemporary painters Wolf Kahn and Emily Mason are a visual duet in color and form. Kahn's rural landscapes are like a deep, vocal pedal point to Mason's lyrical and vibrant abstracts. Their monoprints and monotypes are now being shown at the Center for Contemporary Printmaking in Norwalk.

Both artists are known internationally -- Kahn for his landscapes and Mason for her luminous, nonrepresentational paintings.

In this show, the 60 original prints represent a slight departure from painting for the two artists; their foray into the ancient print process lets them speak their unique visual language using a different vocabulary. The results are compelling, exuberant.

Kahn's love affair with the country barn offers structural, exterior walls as free-floating geometric surfaces hosting bursts of color. In "Dunkley's Barn" a pale white roof is pitched down, framing a bright yellow and pink squall dancing around a sketchy purple doorway. In "Yellow Bush II" a feathery, pale-green shrub perches in front of an angular barn whose sides

are a deep,



Wolf Kahn - *Dunkley's Barn*



Wolf Kahn - *Yellow Bush II*

rubbed orange, pastel pink and black.

"Barns are simple structures and they exist in nature in a way that has to be harmonious," says Kahn. "I try to keep things airy. I don't want them to get heavy." Basic, defined lines are constructs for inner, whimsical brushstrokes. "After Sunset" is minimally abstract with a florid, intertwined sash of orange dividing a languid mass of slate

gray into ground and sky. "I like contradiction. I like to be simple and complicated at the same time," says Kahn.

Mason's abstracts dance wildly around Kahn's landscapes, some connect strongly in a rhythm akin to waltzing partners. All of Mason's pieces are "Untitled." In one print, a square, translucent membrane hangs effortlessly in front of a dark, watery pole, framed on all four sides by swaths of deep orange and burnt yellow. In another print, lime green is an effervescent carpet accented with steel blue marks reminiscent of finger paints that are subtly shaded by faint plumes of goldenrod. It's the intensity of Mason's layering that is sensed before seen.



Emily Mason - *Untitled*

"I try to get a lot of the descriptive stuff out of the way," explains Mason about her spontaneous approach. "If something happens and it seems to be a landscape, I'm not going to deny it in the end. I just won't say what it is in the beginning." That Kahn and Mason have been married for 53 years may have something to do with why this show works so well. The exhibit marks one of the first times the couple is showing their prints together. Each admits that their collective life experiences find their way to the canvas or, in this case, the paper, and then diverge in different expressive genres.

"We influence each other even though our techniques are very different," says Mason. "We live in the same place, travel to the same places. Some of that gets into your work." Kahn says Mason is much more spontaneous in her creative approach.

"She takes much more of a chance than I do. I'm always staying with an image but Emily has the tendency to walk away much sooner." Anthony Kirk, artistic director and Master Printer at the Center for Contemporary Printmaking has known both Kahn and Wolf for 25 years, over which time he has seen them experiment with various printmaking techniques. At times the artists would leave their New York City studios and take a train ride up to print at the center. Many of the works in the exhibition were recently completed in the Helen Frankenthaler Printmaking Cottage at CCP.



Emily Mason - *Untitled*

Kirk says his role with Kahn and Mason has been less teacher and more muse. "I am a conduit to facilitate their ideas," he says.

Kirk explains that creating monoprints and monotypes are two different processes. "A monoprint is a unique print pulled from a plate with an image already incised into it, in contrast to a monotype in which a painting is done on a plain, unworked plate." Mason

creates her monoprints with Master Printer, Janis Stemmerman, based in New York City. By compiling multiple layers of ink which are sent through the press three or four times, Mason is able to create her signature layered, transparent work.

"When I print, I set up a dialogue with the first image and then add something. It evolves. It's a subtle, deep process," she says.