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Abstract painting is Jamaica woman's passage of discovery

by Erika Usui, Chronicle Contributor
01/27/2011

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Don't fight the drama. "If you do, it becomes a means to an end," said Jamaica painter Shenna Vaughn. "But if you don't, it becomes a beginning. It lets you live."

With bold geometrics and hard lines that command immediate attention and earth-tone colors that give the figures a softer edge, Vaughn coexists with her daily chaos by giving tragedy and trauma a chance to reveal themselves on canvas.

Her artwork is a direct narrative of the subconscious stories of her soul, Vaughn explained. Painting allows her to observe herself, to confront demons that she would otherwise ignore.

And in time, she said, painting allows her to release the drama, and to move on.

Vaughn said that the abstract figures in her paintings are a representation of the uninhibited vulnerability that is inevitable in every human life.

For example, the large eyeball with a piercingly dark iris rimmed in red from her acrylic piece, "Mental Chaos 2," shows that no matter where you go, you are always under the careful watch of one entity or another.

The care she puts in selecting only warm-hued pigments, she added, shows off her positive nature. Even if reality is shades of sooty coal, she paints life in her feel-good colors to send the message that, hey, everything's going to be okay. Learn from your mistakes, and the sun will rise again tomorrow.

While the dividing of shapes and colors represents chaos, it also shows a sort of stabilizing balance, Vaughn said. That balance, she added, in turn, represents conquest. It represents power.

Vaughn said that the power represented in her works show how she overcame anger and sorrow after her brother-in-law's death, and also fear and frustration stemming from her mother's difficult medical issues.

It's her desire to connect with those who have experienced the same emotions as they find a piece of their own identity through her introspection, Vaughn said.

She also hopes that her subjection encourages others to take a peek into their own souls, as her paintings are meant to be a reminder of the utter importance of listening to the story of self.

"Because if you don't listen," she said, "you only lead yourself to your own demise."

Vaughn attended FIT and received her bachelor's degree from Hunter College. She has taught at the Boys and Girls Club's after-school program and helps in the remodeling of libraries and schools as a volunteer with the New York Cares' mural projects because, "you have to share art," she said.

The artist participated in the International Group Exhibition at Caelum Gallery in Manhattan last July and has also worked with movie production company Gigantic Pictures/Simom Says to produce art for the movie, "Night Catches Us."

Her latest works will be at Agora Gallery's group show, "Unbound Perspectives," scheduled to run from Feb. 4 to 25. Opening reception is on Feb. 10.

The gallery is at 530 West 25 St. in Chelsea, and is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

She invites visitors to the gallery to relate whatever comes into their minds, to help them learn more about what they think and feel in an atmosphere of non-judgmental curiosity and acceptance.



(Jamaica artist Shenna Vaughn shows off her piece, "Mental Chaos 2," at Agora Art Gallery in Chelsea. Acrylic, right, on canvas titled "Mental Chaos 1." PHOTOS BY AGORA GALLERY