

ARTISTPROFILE

BY CYNTHIA F. WEISFIELD
PHOTOS BY MELODY FARRIN

Zivi Aviraz

Challenging the Rainbow

The Greek goddess Iris was said to touch the sky with a rainbow. Oakland artist Zivi Aviraz touches her canvas with explosions of color.

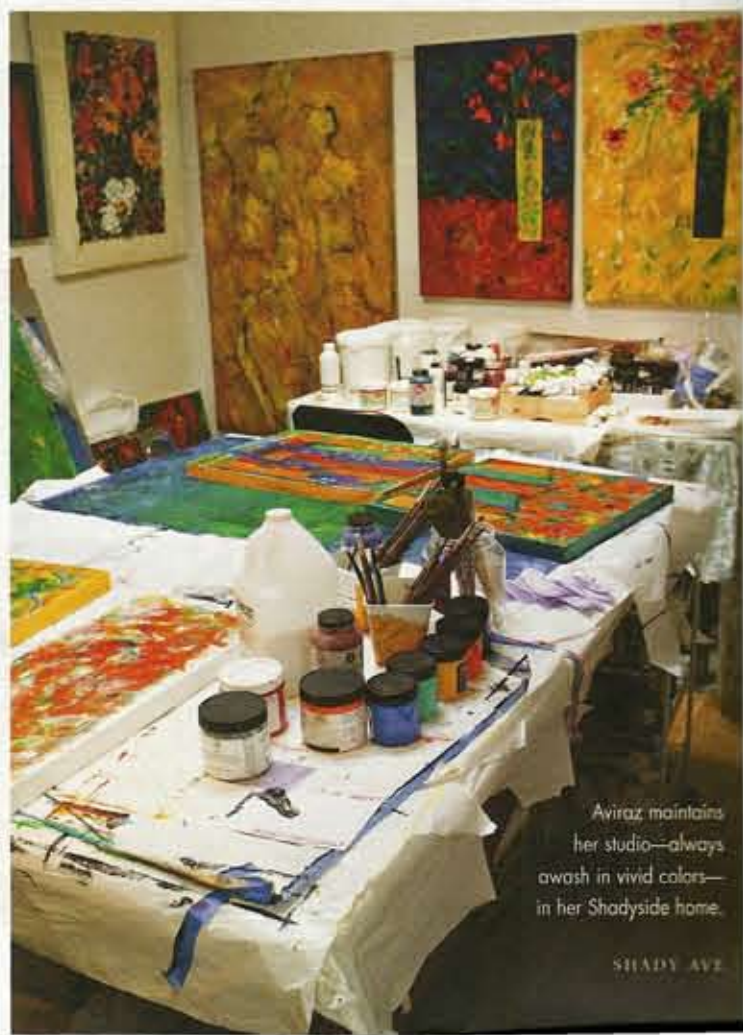
Forget staid bands of primary hues. Her works are layers of color that blend in ingenious ways, such as almost imperceptibly different shades of blue floating next to each other. Or the layers are strikingly vivid contrasts of orange on green that make your eyes dance. The net result is a feeling of depth, a sense of travelling into a highly saturated, Technicolor world.

"I play with color," Aviraz says. "Playing" means she doesn't have a preconceived idea of what the finished piece should look like. "The work starts as one thing and changes," she explains. "It comes out from the work. There's layer upon layer until I come to satisfaction. I work a long time to get there."

The layers aren't always limited to vibrant acrylics. Aviraz recycles extensively. One piece called *Into the Forest* features elongated, 3D shapes resembling trees, which were formed from old stockings. Her works have also incorporated fabric from stretched-out bathing suits, pieces of tulle from her daughters' clothes, and bags that held onions, fruit, and avocados. "The bags create depth and illusion," she says.

A most creative recycling effort was with paint chips. Aviraz puts waxy butcher paper under paintings as she works; paint drips and splatters can be erased off this surface. So she arranged the dried peelings and pasted them on canvas to create a composition titled *In Full Bloom*. It was a laborious process, not to be repeated.

Aviraz was sent to Pittsburgh in 1978 as an emissary of the Israeli government to run the Hebrew department at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh in Squirrel Hill. It was there that she met her husband, who hails from Brazil. They decided to stay here because they thought of the city as halfway between both countries.



Aviraz maintains her studio—always awash in vivid colors—in her ShadySide home.

SHADY AVZ



Pittsburgh, 2010, acrylic & collage on canvas, 48" x 60"

The artist grew up in the seaside city of Haifa. Both of her parents were Holocaust survivors. "They arrived in January 1948 before Israel was even a state," she recounts. "They came ashore in a small boat while the British intercepted a larger one."

She describes her entire family as "creative." Her sister is an art teacher who makes "gorgeous things out of wood." Yet Aviraz herself didn't take her first art class until she was 28 at the JCC with noted local artist and teacher Lila Hirsch Brody.

It was Brody who taught Aviraz the importance of keeping her techniques up to date, and even now, she's always experimenting with new tools and materials. "It's amazing what good tools and quality paint do to help you get to a new level," she says. Indeed, the surfaces of her works reflect that way of thinking, showing paint applied with a variety of brushes and knives.

Since her first experience at the JCC, Aviraz has taken many other classes, but also developed her talent with inspiration from books, galleries, and museums during yearly family trips to Europe when her children were little. It's a process that she calls "constant discovery." "Everything inspires me, from Monet to Rauschenberg," she says.

All media seem to interest her, too. Beyond acrylics and mixed media, watercolor, charcoal, pastel, ceramic, and tile have also responded to her vision.

The works of Aviraz have been shown extensively around Pittsburgh, including the JCC and the Eastside Gallery, an artist-run co-op in the Village of Eastside in East Liberty, to which Aviraz belongs. This month, she will have a show at Palm Beach State College at



To create her acrylic work *Women in Blue*, Aviraz painted four individual pieces and then mounted them together on a larger painted canvas that was framed.

West Palm Beach in Florida. And that's just the beginning. For her 60th birthday, her children bought her a Web site, and that exposure landed her a show at the Agora Gallery Collective Exhibition in New York from June 12 to July 3.

From Israel to Pittsburgh and across the nation, colorist Aviraz is constantly creating beauty wherever she goes.

You can see works by Zivi Aviraz on display as part of the *ColoRIOT* exhibition at Eastside Gallery in the Village of Eastside, 6400 Penn Avenue, in East Liberty. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday, noon to 5. *ColoRIOT* continues through June 30. Visit www.ziviart.com for more information.

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