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It Happens in Hendersonville

BY NORM POWERS

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Drawing Nothing



(http://newbold.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/ART-Nov2005drawings_010_Alpha.jpg)

By Lori Raines

As an artist, Lori Raines has a peculiar wish. “I would like to draw nothing at all,” Lori says.

But to draw nothing, to define blank space, means creating some kind of boundary, a contrast between nothing and something. “You must have the boundaries to see or feel the emptiness,” says Lori, describing a body of work over the past two decades that joins art and philosophy in an exploration of the territory where the undefined begins to take form.

Her work was seen in last year’s “Line And Landscape” exhibition at the Upstairs Artspace in Tryon, and has been on display most recently in Hendersonville at Jongo Java, a popular downtown coffee shop that features a new artist every month.

The 39-year-old Hendersonville native and graduate of the North Carolina School for the Arts in Winston-Salem first explored the *terra incognita* of the creative impulse when she took up Fiber Art at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, a course major broad enough that she could work in a variety of media. “The concept was that all media can be seen as textural, as having a structure to define or ignore,” Lori says. But as she worked with fiber, she

became fascinated as much by the spaces between the threads as by the weaving itself, for without that space, she realized, there would be no structure to the design.

Further illumination came when she spent her junior year in the Netherlands at the Academy for Visual Art, known internationally for its fiber art department. “It’s impossible to go there and not notice how huge the sky is and how flat the earth is, and then a steeple would penetrate the two,” Lori says of her year in Holland. “I loved the places where they would connect.”

During her time in Europe, she visited Prague and an exhibit of the work of Czech photographer Pavel Banka, known for his super-scaled, expansive landscapes. “It was a giant space filled with 20-foot photographs of the earth and sky, all black and white,” Lori recalls. “My breath was literally taken away.” The places where nothing touched something, she came to believe, are where art is born.

Lori has used drawing, painting and even her iPhone as vehicles to delineate the expressive power contained in empty space. Her ink drawings, some of them quite large, contain in their cool grey and black tones and expansive forms the suggestion of emerging figures about to take concrete shape. “Drawing with ink is by far the most challenging for me. I have to stay very present, one false move and it’s over,” Lori says. “But I feel my drawings could go on forever. My dream would be to fill a fifty-foot wall with one drawing so that the viewer would be forced into the voids, slow spaces and faster moments.”

Her works on canvas incline more toward the figurative, but still contain vast open spaces punctuated by slender vertical forms, washed with a haze that makes them more dreamscape than landscape. “In my older work, I just let it fly, big and conceptual,” Lori says. “Over time, I’ve tightened up a bit and honed in on the proportions that people recognize as landscapes.”

What Lori calls her “iPhoneography,” the most recent addition to her artistic armamentarium, developed in response to a diagnosis of a neurological condition called Generalized Dystonia, which produces periodic loss of muscle control. “I’ve had to change the way I work because some days I can’t lift my arms or even stand,” Lori says of the disorder, still poorly understood by medical researchers. “The iPhoneography is easier on my body, and fun to do. Art is art, and any creative process has its place. I’m not a snob or a purist about it.”

But for the days when her mobility is hers to control, Lori feels a renewed attraction for her first love, fiber art, and has begun experimenting with knitting using steel and silk — a combination of the rigid and the flexible that Lori thinks can be used to further explore the threshold between formlessness and the infinite possibilities that can burst into the phenomenal world. Lori's yoga and meditation practice provide further insight. "There's a space between the inhale and the exhale," Lori says, "but they have to be represented to see that in-between space. I guess I'll always be trying to draw the spaces in between, but I can't really draw nothing, can I?"