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CELEBRATING THE GOOD LIFE IN FAIRFAX COUNTY



"Blue Heron Marsh," 2004, oil on canvas, 8' x 10', with Nolan

MARCH 2006

DEPARTMENTS



"CIVIL CANAL," FREDELL WINTERSCHLER, 9" X 16", IN ISSUE NOVEMBER PAGE 82

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UNBOUNDED IMAGINATION



LESLIE NOLAN

BY LILLIS WERDER

If your painting looks like a greeting card, you've gone in the wrong direction," quips Herndon artist Leslie Nolan. "I want to create paintings that evoke emotion: love, inner peace, friendship, fury, agitation, estrangement, jealousy, angst, disappointment or longing."

Leslie's paintings feature strong, explosive patterns and dramatic swirls of intense color, applied with verve and panache. Many of her paintings contain vivid colors depicting restless energy and are formed with brushstrokes of volcanic, hot orange. Some pieces show rich textures in shooting, melting, embracing colors that run the gamut of heated emotion. Other works show nude figures languishing in cool, intense turquoise, as blue as the sea off the Amalfi coast. The forms are seated, solitary and wistful with white, elongated and angular shoulders. These calmer figures reveal a spirit or soul captured at a precise moment, reflecting an intense personal memory. The serene and submissive posture of a subject gives her paintings an erotic charge.

“
*I like my brush strokes to be visible. I don't like
blending soft colors. I am creating my pieces through
exuberance and spontaneous brushwork.*
”

Leslie's home, much like a private gallery, is adorned with progressive stages of her creativity beginning with the years when she resided in South America while with the U.S. Department of State. Her medium in these first artistic years was photography, as she captured revealing black-and-white portraits of the natives in Ecuador, Columbia and Peru performing the routine tasks in their lives. "I loved the stark and emotional patterns in black-and-white photography," Leslie recalls.

Although she admits to an avid interest in art early in elementary school, Leslie did not begin her career as a painter until leaving her government position a mere 10 years ago. At that time, she

Facing page: "ACQUA," "MORNING," 15" x 22"



enrolled as a student in The Art League in Alexandria. She then apprenticed to a number of respected artists including Jean Gill. "It was through Jean that I learned about watercolor technique, composition, design and color theory."

Progressing further toward her passion, Leslie then turned to noted watercolorist Steve Fleming, who "developed within me an ability for painting the human figure." Leslie admits, "I love painting figures best. People are fascinating. They have feelings, complex thoughts, and do crazy and goofy things!"

Born and raised in Portland, Oregon, Leslie has lived in Northern Virginia much of her adult life. Married for 26 years to Steve Halter, she has one stepson, Ryan, and two sons, Edward and Doug. Leslie's first portraits were, naturally, of those familiar to her. She drew her sons playing musical instruments in the school band, captured her father's speculative gaze and created self-portraits. These earlier works were made using charcoal or pen-and-ink.

Through the years, Leslie has shifted her energies towards different types of subjects. She is presently intrigued by live models and the



powerful composition she can recreate on canvas using watercolors, acrylics or oils. She incorporates her own interpretation of the models' personalities into their poses and infuses this into her works. She relates one such experience: "I invent a narrative about the models, the interaction and dynamics between their relationship. I see a schism between two women seated together, heads turned sideways in opposite directions, as if an argument recently erupted." She views the scene as "friendship thwarted." In this painting, the colors play and mingle acrobatically with one another as these imaginary, conflicted figures project themselves vivaciously into the foreground, becoming strangely captivating. Leslie's goal is to stimulate the viewer's mind and senses with "shocking luminosity of color creating the ultimate expression of mood or emotion." Leslie strives to "create paintings

that have subconscious meaning to them, that stir someone's inner feelings. My work has an edge to it."

Another source of inspiration has come from Leslie's travels to the Pacific Northwest. She is drawn to great tracts of land where there is nothing but nature. Also intrigued by regional scenes such as those



near the Potomac River, Leslie occasionally engages in a day trek with other artists to paint *en plein air*. She captures her impressions of boats bathed in the shimmer of the afternoon sun. "I like my brushstrokes to be visible," she says. "I don't like blending soft colors. I am creating my pieces through exuberance and spontaneous brushwork."

When not painting out-of-doors, Leslie works in her at-home atelier where she first creates a miniature sketch to outline the light and dark patterns. She then begins to paint, extending her brushwork out on tangents. Throughout this process, she brings together jarring colors to define a structured whole. "I want those who see my work to come away thinking about what they saw," she confides. "My work cannot be bland or boring."

Ever-evolving, Leslie describes her current perspective this way: "I now want to paint what I don't see. After being drawn to the personality of a model, I accentuate and exaggerate what is already present. I use reality only as a guide."

Picasso once said, "Painting isn't an aesthetic operation. It's a form of magic designed as a mediator between this strange, hostile world



and us, a way of seizing the power by giving form to our terrors as well as our desires." Leslie achieves this end as she applies the principles of freedom, spontaneity and discipline to her art. In its pure simplicity, there exists a realm of unbounded imagination and a true and visual excitement.

Leslie's work has won many awards in juried shows in Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. As a participant in the Art in Public Places program coordinated by the Council for the Arts of Herndon, her work is exhibited in public and private offices in the area. Her work can be seen now through April in the Main Street Bank at 727 Elden Street in Herndon. She is a member of the Potomac Valley Watercolorists, The Art League, the League of Reston Artists, the Capitol Hill Art League and the Strathmore Hall Artists. For more information, contact Leslie at

703-450-5484 or visit <http://home.comcast.net/~lmnolan>. 

ESCAPE PAGE TOP: "LANDSCAPE OF THE MISCO," ACRYLIC, 15" X 22", AND "BACK TO BACK," WATERMEDIUM, 15" X 22"; THIS PAGE TOP: "THE SQUARE," WATERCOLOR, 22" X 11", AND "ORANGE CHAIR," WATERMEDIUM, 15" X 22"