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ARTS AND HUMANITIES: Artist's recent abstractions showcased at the Morris

By DR. TOM MACK Columnist Feb 21, 2019



Anne Marchand's painting "Mirror" is pictured. Marchand's "Recent Abstractions" is on display at the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta.

Submitted photo

In a talk she gave to celebrate the opening of an exhibition of her most recent work at the Morris in Augusta, Anne Marchand made reference to her "creative well," the reservoir of past experience and indelible impressions from which she draws her inspiration.

For this particular Washington, D.C.-based artist, those influences are both numerous and evolving. She can trace her earliest creativity-nourishing moment to her childhood and a family-sponsored trip to Latin America where she encountered landscapes and cultural practices different from those of her Southern upbringing. Add to that travel-fueled adventure her summers at a beach resort in Alabama, where she became mesmerized by the fluid demarcation between sea and sky, and the camping trips of her youth, when she first encountered the bioluminescence of fireflies; and one can appreciate some of the memories that form the foundation of Marchand's mature artistic expression.

Adult trips to New Mexico, where she found new vistas commensurate with her love of distance and space, and her travel to India, where her engagement with color gained exotic reinforcement, added even more depth to her "creative well." Combine with these experiences her love of the expansive mindfulness to be found in reading poetry and the views of outer space made available to the human eye through the miracle of the Hubble telescope still recording after its launch into Earth orbit in 1990, and we have a road map of one artist's continuing journey of discovery.

Familiarity with these creative landmarks helps visitors appreciate the abstract canvases that grace the two galleries at the Morris currently reserved for temporary exhibitions. Most of the pieces are large-scale works made possible by Marchand's move two years ago from a small workspace on Dupont Circle in the District of Columbia to a much larger, post-industrial studio in suburban Maryland. The upsize in her workspace made possible a corresponding increase in the size of her paintings.

"Mirror," measuring 6 feet square, offers a good example of the most recent scale of her work and her abiding incorporation of the various elements from her creative reservoir. A complex, largely spontaneous arrangement of geometric shapes, some stamped and some laid on with a spatula, share center stage with expressive explosions of color and thin threads of white paint. As the title indicates, the piece reflects several experiential influences. The application of tree bark in the center alludes, for example, to Marchand's deep affection for the natural landscape; the orange and red curvilinear motifs added to the right margin hearken back to personal excursions to Mughal India.

Layering, often facilitated by the use of unorthodox materials, increases the tactile allure of many of Marchand's works. Consider the application of fabric and glass beads to the canvas in "A Thousand Years" or the encrustation of garnet and mica in "Monde Materiel" or "World Apparatus." Both pieces speak of the accretion of knowledge and experience, how each step in our individual life journeys contribute to the sum total of our being.

As with most of the artist's work, there is a characteristic attention to surface treatment and an alluring depth of field. The bifold effect of her expressive practice can be seen perhaps most dramatically in her two-panel acrylic and latex piece entitled "Threshold." Closeup, the painting is a tour-de-force of poured and splattered paint in luminous tints and tones. From a distance, the 5-foot-high and 10-foot-wide painting reads like an image of the surface of our planet as seen from outer space.

"Anne Marchand: Recent Abstractions" is on display at the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta through April 14. For more information, visit themorris.org or call 706-724-7501.

A recipient of the Governor's Award in the Humanities, Dr. Tom Mack holds the rank of USC Distinguished Professor Emeritus. Of his six books to date, three are devoted to colorful local history: "Circling the Savannah," "Hidden History of Aiken County," and "Hidden History of Augusta."

