

South Carolina State Museum in Columbia, SC, Features Exhibition of Abstract Works

The new art exhibit on view at the South Carolina State Museum in Columbia, SC, examines a topic not always quickly associated with the traditions of the Palmetto State – abstract art. The exhibit, *Abstract Art in South Carolina: 1949-2012*, on view through Aug. 26, 2012, in the Lipscomb Art Gallery, is the first inclusive look at the evolution and influences of abstract painting and sculpture in South Carolina.



The Structure, by William Halsey, an oil on masonite work from 1949, courtesy of the Gibbes Museum of Art. Photo courtesy SC State Museum

The exhibit will include work by pioneering artists such as William Halsey, Corrie McCallum, J. Bardin, Carl Blair and Merton Simpson, and contemporary artists currently working in communities across South Carolina today, such as Brian Rutenberg, James Busby, Shaun Cassidy, Enid Williams, Paul Yanko, Katie Walker and Tom Stanley, among many others.



Cherry Grove 2, a 2004-05 oil on canvas, is an example of the abstract art of Myrtle Beach, SC's Brian Rutenberg, a successful, creative force in the New York art world. Photo courtesy SC State Museum

In all, work by more than 40 artists will be included in the exhibition, which focuses on one of the most important aspects of South Carolina's visual culture.

"South Carolina has a rich history in visual art, and abstract painting and sculpture have played a huge role in this history beginning in the mid-20th century," said Curator of Art Paul Matheny.

"Following World War II, the appreciation of art and culture began to expand

across the state. Local artists began exploring new ideas and pursued artistic opportunities in and out of the state, and South Carolina college and university art departments began - and continue - to bring in artists from across the United States, to teach and exhibit their work."

This practice brought in new ideas about how to approach the making of art. In other instances, South Carolina natives, influenced by other artists and exploring their own ideas, pursued artistic opportunities outside of the state. Their influences, such as the Southern landscape, tidal creeks and marshes, plus a variety of cultural experiences, remained influential in their work.

"Many influences worked together to bring South Carolina art to the point it is today," Matheny said. "This exhibition reflects the journeys made by these individuals, the art they created, and their influences along the way."

"The exhibit includes many large scale works of art on canvas, as well as mixed media work that pushed the boundaries, and our perceptions, of how abstract art is perceived," said the curator. "Museum guests will be surprised and inspired by the work of these important artists."



Untitled, by Merton Simpson, oil on canvas in 1949. Courtesy of the Gibbes Museum of Art. Photo courtesy SC State Museum

Matheny said the art includes paint media from acrylic and oil on canvas, wood panel and paper to three-dimensional works made of cast aluminum, other metals, and stone.

The project is funded in part by the Cultural Council of Richland and Lexington Counties and the South Carolina Arts Commission, which receives support from the National Endowment of the Arts and the John and Susan Bennett Memorial Arts Fund of the Coastal Community Foundation of SC.

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, contact Paul Matheny at 803/898-4921 or visit (www.southcarolinastatemuseum.org).

Design Atlanta.

Executive Director, Karen Watson states that the gallery is excited to be presenting such a large and varied exhibition of Riis' work. She says it began in 2009 when Jon Eric Riis' work was featured in the exhibition *Tradition/Innovation: American Masterpieces of Southern Craft and Traditional Art* that was at the Sumter County Gallery of Art in September of 2009. Riis was also a presenter for "Talking Threads: A Quilt & Fiber Arts Symposium" in conjunction with the *Tradition/Innovation* exhibition. Watson remembers Riis as being warm and gracious and enthusiastic about The Sumter County Gallery of Art and how well the exhibition

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Sumter County Gallery of Art in Sumter, SC, Features Works by Jon Eric Riis

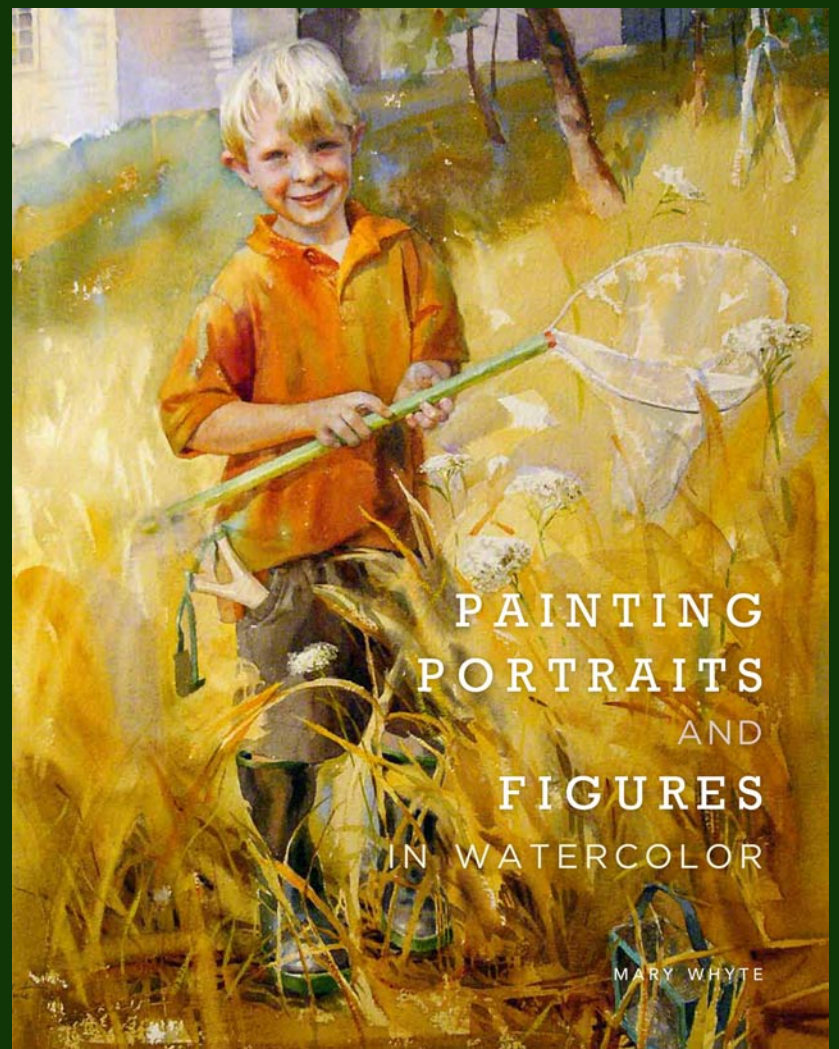
Sumter County Gallery of Art in Sumter, SC, is presenting the exhibit, *Shimmer: The Contemporary Tapestries of Jon Eric Riis*, on view through Apr. 20, 2012.



Work by Jon Eric Riis

Riis holds a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, an MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan and was awarded a Fulbright scholarship for his studies in India. Riis was also an original founder of the Museum of

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and symposium had been organized and presented. The gallery immediately approached him about a possible show and he was very receptive to the idea.



Work by Jon Eric Riis

Considered by many to be the nation's leading contemporary tapestry artist, Riis, who is from Atlanta, GA, has perhaps more than any other artist, taken the ancient craft of hand-woven tapestry to the level of important contemporary fine art. Often imbuing his subject matter with highly critical social and cultural ideas, such as the Iraq war, Riis' provocative art is as important for its content as it is for its stunning execution and unmatched technical prowess. The meticulous works are supremely crafted, astonishing in visual effect and profound in concept.

Riis' work is informed by his research into the historical textiles of Pre-Columbian Peru, Imperial China, and Russian ecclesiastical vestments. Many of the tapestries in the Sumter exhibition are in the form of a "universal coat," or religious Buddhist vestments. This form offers many opportunities for reflection on the human condition.

Riis states, "clothing is our 'second skin'. A coat can be interpreted as a container for all of Humanity's positive and negative attributes, protection, warmth and I play with the hidden aspects of this, contrasting the exterior with the interior."

Watson sees the jacket as a "story board", illustrating a narrative on the outside of the coat that, when opened reveals a startling conclusion - often addressing contemporary socio-political content within the hidden, equally detailed interior of each piece which is often at odds with the viewer's expectations.

Rebecca A.T. Stevens of The Textile Museum in Washington, DC, states, "Whether questioning race relations, religious obsession, folk tales, or cultural symbols, Riis uses myth and historical textiles to investigate contemporary issues of beauty and personal identity and uses these references to remind the viewer of the continuity of humankind's struggles and accomplishments. His works are luxurious and intriguing, yet the subject matter is often unsettling and unexpected. He has certainly pushed traditional tapestry into the 21st century one thread at a time."

The art of tapestry weaving was practiced by ancient peoples from Egypt to Peru. Tapestry weaving emerged in Europe as an important art form in the Middle Ages, when large tapestries served practical and aesthetic functions such as insulating hangings and moveable interior decorations. In Asia, tapestries were generally used for smaller accessories, functional objects and fine apparel. Riis' work has been influenced by Russian ecclesiastical textiles, Russian icons and imperial court costumes from the Qing dynasty in China (1644-1911). In 2006 Riis had the opportunity to spend time in Eastern Tibet and many of the works in this exhibition reference this experience.



Work by Jon Eric Riis

Riis states, "I try to link my work to the ancestral and universal textile tradition, using historical iconography to address contemporary themes. Much of my work abounds in references to myths, beliefs and the material culture of the past. I want my work to take on an aura of the sacred and ceremonial and above all the luxurious and sensual. I often embellish my tapestries with precious materials

continued on Page 12

Carolina Arts, March 2012 - Page 11