

Broad Street Review

The Secret Life of Flowers

by Andrew Mangravite
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Guna S. Mundheim, *Pods Arriving*, Watercolor on paper, 22 x 30 inches

The watercolor is usually a placid affair - and when you're discussing floral watercolors, it can be almost sleep-inducing. Then Guna Mundheim comes along.

The watercolors in her latest show at Gross McCleaf consist of both floral pieces and landscapes. Much of the work is set in New Mexico, but the show includes a few Vermont studies as well. The largest of the floral pieces, *Blue Quartet*, is (as its name implies) a suite, whose titles - *Orchid and Lemons I*, *Orchid in Parts III*, *Orchid Reaching II* and *Orchid Restored IV* - suggest a sort of loose narrative structure.

Mundheim's colors - blues, reds, purples and greens - are pleasing to the eyes, and her mild fragmentation of the image plain creates a nice sense of "business."

Her large floral pieces are never visually boring. But closer examination of the surfaces reveals that even more is going on here than a cursory glance might have revealed.

Tiny spirit-like figures leap and gambol about. What they represent isn't immediately clear. Are they spirits of the plant life Mundheim has depicted? Are they ghosts of departed people the artist has known?

In any event, they certainly exert a presence, and they add a strange layer of immediacy to what might otherwise be dismissed as merely pleasant academic work.

Amaryllis and Jumpers is another multi-part work, only this time four images are stacked atop one another and presented in a single frame, almost like a strip of motion picture film. In this piece a pinkish color prevails, and the "Jumpers" (as Mundheim's tiny sprite-like figures are now called) are brought much more to the fore.

The Tucson-inspired works are on the whole more traditional and a desert brown tends to dominate - although My Tucson II, with its colorful vase of cut flowers, offers a welcome relief.

The four small Vermont pieces are also splashes of color: hillsides covered in turning leaves and, in one instance, stark tree trunks set off by a vivid orange backdrop.

Sharing the gallery spade with Guna S. Mundheim is a group show, "Color as Directive" which is mostly comprised of landscapes by the artist Rose Naftulin, Karen Segal, Jane Piper (who is most heavily represented with four pieces) and Jan Baltzell.