

Crossman Exhibit is an Abstract Glimpse into a High School Yearbook

Interview by Scott Iwasaki, The Park Record, July 7, 2013

An artist can be inspired by a variety of things — nature, words, people, circumstances, politics and memories, to name a few. It all depends on what the artist sees in these things. Painter Marshall Crossman has used her oils to paint series based on beaches, swimmers and even women shopping. She recently completed a series called "Reunion," based on portraits of a graduation class in 1963. The artist, who is currently creating watercolor art in the Alentejo region of Portugal, was inspired by her husband's high school reunion. Crossman, whose new works will be the focus of an artist opening at the Julie Nester Gallery this weekend, beginning on Friday, July 5, answered a few questions for The Park Record via email and said she would not be able to make it to the opening since she will be working in Portugal for the remainder of the month.

Park Record: What drew you to the visual arts?

Marshall Crossman: I was drawn to painting as a child, probably through museum visits and art history. Though I sampled several areas of art-making — drawing, printmaking, ceramics, painting was always my passion.

PR: Why did you decided to pursue painting instead of, say, sculpting, and why do you work mostly with oils?

MC: As a painter, I am continually fascinated by the alchemy of paint. I am amazed by the range of expression communicated by the medium of oil paint on canvas. Oil paint enables a depth of color, which is difficult to attain with other mediums. It also dries slowly. Both of these qualities are important to my painting technique. My painting process allows for a lot of spontaneity in both paint-handling and color. I begin a painting with a basic concept, which transforms radically as the canvas develops. Working wet into wet, I wander through many stages of paint action and destruction before arriving at a finish that feels resolved.

PR: How did the idea for 'Reunion' come about?

MC: 'Reunion' is a collection of new paintings from the 'Class Photo Series.' This series began back in the summer of 1983, when I attended my husband's 20th high school reunion. I was intrigued by the exaggerated poses, hairdos, and draped shoulders of the women in the 1963 yearbook photos. The photos told a story of the people and the time, both individually and collectively. This reunion inspired my 'Class Photo Series.'

PR: (You) started painting the works back in 1983 and have returned to them from time to time. Was there any particular reason?

MC: I like working in a series. The process and evolution of the paint expression is what interests me most, rather than changing subject matter or political statement. I have several series that I return to: 'The Class Photo Series,' 'Beach Series,' 'Women Shopping' and others.

PR: Have you noticed a change or an evolution in your approach with these works over the past 30 years?

MC: In 30 years there has been a lot of evolution within this series. For example, the basic grid structure of the Class Photo Series has remained, but the color palette, gesture, and paint manipulation has changed greatly.

PR: Do you have the urge to redo the first ones you completed, or do you ever think a work can be called complete?

MC: For me a work is rarely 'finished.' Sometimes when a painting is returned to me from an exhibition, and I can see it with a fresh eye, I am not satisfied. I might repaint an area, which drives gallery owners crazy, and then I have to reshoot the painting. Other times when I see a previously problematic painting it will feel complete. I have found that I hold grudges with paintings, which were difficult to resolve.

PR: What were the unique challenges of capturing what you wanted with these abstract portraits in 'Reunion,' as opposed to other series you have painted?

MC: One of the challenges with the abstracted portrait of the 'Class Photo Series' was allowing the paint gesture tell the story rather than realistically rendering the face.

I wanted a non-portrait portrayal of human emotion.

PR: What made the challenges worthwhile to go through when painting these works?

MC: I enjoy the painting process of creation and destruction. Accidents, mistakes and taking risks make the best art.

PR: Are there more 'Reunion' portraits that you are currently working on to show in the future?

MC: I don't know right now. I will probably move on to another series for a while. Right now I am looking forward to experimenting with my watercolors.

The Julie Nester Gallery, 1280 Iron Horse Dr., will host an artist opening featuring Marshall Crossman's "Reunion" paintings on Friday, July 5, from 5:30 p.m. until 8 p.m. For more information, visit www.julienestergallery.com. For more information about Marshall Crossman, visit www.marshallcrossman.com.