

Leanne Venier: A Rising Star

story and photos by Bill Oakey

Sometimes when a person steps out on a limb, he gets a little worried that it might get chopped off. After a couple of visits to the Pump Project art complex in East Austin, I became emboldened by my impressions of a new discovery. Her name is Leanne Venier and I quickly began referring to her among my friends and other artists as "a rising star." Well, not to worry about my assessment. In May at the Arthouse at the Jones Center's annual 5X7 fundraiser, about 500 artists showed their work. At 9:00 sharp they blew the whistle and patrons could run to their favorite art pieces and grab the hooks from the ones they wanted to purchase. It took less than ten minutes for all four of Leanne's to be sold.

When I sat down to talk to Leanne, a single phrase came up right away. "I'm attracted to vibrant colors," she told me. That's a good way to sum up what is most striking when you first come across her work. It hits you from across the room. This artistry evolved over time from Leanne's childhood interest in drawing and toy sculptures, her later art studies, and a host of other influences, including a fascination with the psychology of Carl Jung.

Leanne is an abstract painter. But she never imagined art as a career when she was a child. "That was not part of the paradigm that I grew up with," she explained. "It was go to the university, get a responsible job, and make a lot of money. I went to school in Ontario, Canada, and there you have to decide by ninth grade what your career path is going to be. I went into engineering and that's what I studied in college after I moved to the states. When I moved to California, and started working as an engineer, I finally started taking art classes. I took drawing classes, photography, and interior design at a local community college."

After college, Leanne lived in Italy for several years before moving to Austin. Some of her favorite artists at that time were Picasso, Kandinsky, and Pollock. "When I first went to Europe I got a chance to see lots of modern art, especially in Paris. I was always drawn to abstracts, with high energy and vibrant colors. While I was living in Italy I started painting with watercolors and also got into ceramics. But it was when I moved to Austin that I started doing the type of painting that I am doing now."

The amazing thing about Leanne's work is that she has only been doing it since 2006. Her pieces convey a feeling of richness in tone and texture that one would think is the work of a much more seasoned artist. I wanted to know how she became inspired to approach a new painting. "My inspiration always starts off with whatever color I'm drawn to on a particular day. I'm not thinking thematically. I'm not analyzing or judging my work. I never know what I'm going to end up with when I start a painting."



"THE RECEPTIVE"

In two short years, Leanne has already built up an impressive resume. Her work is currently shown at the Trevisan International Art Gallery in Italy, as well as her Pump Project studio here in Austin. Through her website, www.leannevenier.com, she was invited to appear at the 11th Annual International Art Exhibition in Puglia, Italy. At this event she earned top honors by receiving the Grand Prize of the Jury.

Here in Austin she has entered into an arrangement to have her artwork featured and offered for sale on the website of Vintage Modern Homes. Photographs of her art pieces gorgeously displayed in these home settings were recently featured in both Good Life Magazine in Austin, as well as the Wall Street Journal. The marketing of homes with high quality artwork is a growing trend in Austin, which makes a lot of sense because the artwork certainly gives the impression of increased value for the homes.

In a few years it will be fun to look back at 2008 and think about the artists who were just becoming established in Austin at that time. And if my predictions are on target, I'll be glad that I purchased the Leanne Venier piece when I did. It's a lot cheaper to invest in a rising star before the price becomes out of reach.

Bill Oakey is an Austin contemporary artist, specializing in art photography and modern digital art. You can contact him at boakey39@gmail.com. Please email him your listings of art openings, topic suggestions for the column, as well as artist bios and samples of artists' work.



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