

ARTIST EVOLVES CALLIGRAPHY INTO PAINTING

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The ABC's of art



JOANN VITELLI/SENTINEL

Artist Brenda Heim goes through a range of emotions at the Mount Dora Center for the Arts as she describes her work, which evolved from calligraphy.

Painter puts handwriting on the wall

By Deborah Kane

SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

MOUNT DORA — In a paint-spattered garage in Tavares, artist Brenda Heim turns on music and gets ready to paint.

She leaves the garage door open, and a gentle breeze blows as she warms up with a painting exercise: In sweeping motions, she moves the brush across the canvas spelling out the letters of the alphabet from A to Z.

In many of her finished works, the letters can still be seen: An "O" may be a womb, an "L" is a figure standing against a stark background, and a "C" is the shape of a breast.

Forming letters is the natural starting point for the 33-year-old Heim, who has spent the past 13 years studying calligraphy and mastering six type styles.

But the letters on these canvases aren't just calligraphic; the broad strokes are larger, less formed. And they are no longer confined to the lines on a page.

"Calligraphy was too structured for me," Heim said. "I felt I was getting stuck. I wanted something looser, more immediate and more physical."

Now, almost two years since she began incorporating calligraphy into ab-

stract expressionist works, Heim is having her first exhibit.

She is one of three artists whose works are on display at the Mount Dora Center for the Arts, at 138 E. Fifth Ave. The show, *Two Painters and a Sculptress*, opened May 11 and runs through June 15.

It features 17 of Heim's acrylics, watercolors by Titusville artist Tom Anderson, and alabaster sculpture by Jacksonville artist Sheryl Hinsdale.

"Brenda's work is striking," said Jim Marler, executive director of the art center and curator of the exhibit. "You can still see the influence of the calligraphy."

About the time Heim began to feel cornered by calligraphy, she was introduced to a form of abstract expressionism by a friend who suggested it as a form of therapy.

Heim, who has never had formal art training, decided to try it to explore some of her own frustrations. She describes it as "anger-release work."

"It's a great way to dump emotional garbage," Heim said.

When she works in this style, everything — from the music she listens to and the clothes she wears to the colors in her palette — is influenced by Heim's mood that day.

"One day I could be painting to jazz

or classical and the next day I'll put on Disney animation music," Heim said. "It all depends on how I feel."

Heim's recent moods have led her from painting black, gray and white canvases to richly colored works, with swirls of royal blue, purple and gold.

"For a long time, I had been living in a black and white world," Heim explained. "My apartment was decorated in black and white, the clothes I wore were dark. I've decided that colors are OK."

Among the paintings on display is her first colored work, "The Heim Women."

One day in November, Heim said, she got off the phone after an upsetting conversation with one of her relatives and began painting.

Black and gray stringy lines and blotches cover the white canvas. In a bottom corner, figures of her mother and her grandmother hover.

"I almost destroyed it," Heim said. "I took it outside, threw it on the grass and left it there. A few days later, I looked at it again."

Heim salvaged the painting, which she describes as a reminder, and added dabs of bright fuchsia that lightened and transformed the work.

Her evolution to color is evident in Heim's most recent painting, "Look Who's Dancing," in which splashes of

aqua and bright blue cover the canvas.

One of Heim's most striking works is a collage, "The Power of a Woman."

Silver-laid tissue paper is covered with layered squares of marbled, painted canvas. The flow of the squares leads the viewer through the painting toward a lone figure standing upright in the top corner of the canvas.

The painting is dedicated to Elisabeth Pringle, who has inspired Heim. Pringle, a clinical psychologist and the director of the Shiloh South Center for Human Growth in Leesburg, said she sees "wonderful energy and enthusiasm" in Heim's work.

In many ways, "The Power of a Woman," is symbolic of Heim's new style. The forms of letters appear in the paintings, but they are suffused with a less obvious, more textured meaning.

In an artist's statement, Heim describes the difference between an art form she has mastered and one that she still is developing:

"In some ways I still feel like a calligrapher, in the sense that my individual works may be fragments of a larger word or phrase," Heim writes. "The painter in me realizes, however, that the language of those words or phrases is not to be read. It is a language to be seen and felt."