

Spartanburg Art Museum Features Works by Laura Spong

Chasing the Undertow, a collection of paintings that trace the life work of Laura Spong, an 85-year-old South Carolina artist famous for her bold non-objective style, is on exhibit at Spartanburg Art Museum in Spartanburg, SC, through Feb. 18, 2012.

The 30-some works-of-art date from her early career in the mid-1950s to some of her most recent work painted just this year. As a whole, it shows the development of a vision that has had its ups and downs for more than 60 years but that has matured and been embraced late in life by patrons near and as far away as Hollywood.



Work by Laura Spong

For the most part, the works have been hung chronologically in the gallery, with the older paintings in the back and the newer ones near the entrance. The progression and change in style are obvious to even the most untrained eye. Spong's work has always been in the non-objective/abstract/expressionist camp of creativity. But as this exhibit clearly demonstrates, her work became more and more non-objective - where there is no resemblance of reality - as Spong aged. With her pieces *Madonna And Child* (mid-1950s) and *Flower* (1960s) there are visual hints that the resulting images were modeled from "things" she might have actually seen. However, skip ahead to her three-canvas piece *Why?*, painted in 2010, and the imagery is bolder with more contrast, more subtle uses of color, more layers, and is representational of nothing tangible. To walk through this exhibit is to take in a quick summery of the artist's life's work.

"We are most fortunate to have Laura Spong's work here at the Chapman Cultural Center," Marketing Director Steve Wong said. "Even though she has been a productive artist in South Carolina for many years, it hasn't been until the past few years that she has achieved the recognition that she deserves. Actually, it wasn't until she turned 80 that people really began to seriously collect her work. I think one of her biggest breaks came when her work was chosen to decorate the set of the Lifetime television series *Drop Dead Diva*. That gave her national exposure."

"I find it most interesting that she is an older artist (now 85) and a long-time South Carolina resident who deals exclusively in non-objective work," Wong said. "It's very modern, and, of course, the images are not of anything. They are vibrant shapes and colors, accented with squiggling black and white lines and dashes of contrasting color. They speak on a very emotional level, to a part of your brain that bypasses words or realistic images."

Spong was born in Nashville, TN, in 1926 as Laura Miles. She graduated cum laude from Vanderbilt University in 1948 with a degree in English. Her arts education was confined to two studio and one art history class. She married Ernest Maye Spong Jr., moved to his hometown of Columbia, SC, and gave birth to two twin sons in 1949.

During the 1950s and '60s, Spong was active with the local artists' guild, winning various awards and exhibiting within the state. During the 1970s and '80s with the death of her husband and the need to provide for a family, Spong took on various art-related jobs, and kept a somewhat lower profile in the working-artists community. It was in the 1990s, when Spong decided to embrace her art wholeheartedly that she took a studio in Columbia's Vista, the chic downtown district, that her work began to gain a far-reaching appeal with it appearing throughout the state, the South, and beyond. Today, she is considered one of South Carolina's most prolific and most-sought-after artists.

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Museum at 864/582-7616 or visit (www.spartanburgartmuseum.org).

USC Upstate in Spartanburg, SC, Offers Works by Art Ed Majors

USC Upstate in Spartanburg, SC, will present the exhibit, *Inspiring the Imagination Through Art Education*, featuring works by students majoring in art education, on view in the Curtis R. Harley Art Gallery, from Jan. 13 through Feb. 27, 2012. A reception and lecture will take place on Jan. 24, at 7pm.



Work by Holly Black

Exhibiting artists include Brock Allen, Eddie Barry, Holly Black, Katelyn Gmerek, Lori Mendiola, Dianna Painter, Sarah Scott and Dana Wilkins. These students have completed or will be completing their degrees or certification in 2011 or 2012.

The purpose of the exhibit is to highlight work by these students both as artists and future educators. Artworks in a full range of media will be featured. Some were completed in USC Upstate courses such as painting, crafts and printmak-

ing. Others were created independently, outside of class.



Work by Eddie Barry

Part of the exhibit, located in the FOCUS Gallery will showcase teacher candidates working with students during practicum or directed teaching. These will include projects made by students in elementary through high school classrooms throughout the Upstate as well as educational philosophies and related lesson plans.

The exhibit, reception, and lecture are free and open to the public. Local educators and administrators are encouraged to attend.

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, contact Mary Lou Hightower at 864/503-5817 or e-mail to (mhightower@uscupstate.edu).

You can contact us by calling 843/825-3408 or by e-mail at - info@carolinaarts.com but do it before the 24th of the month prior to our next issue.

Art & Antique Show Benefiting the Spartanburg Art Museum

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In keeping with today's economy I have changed the rates on some of my workshops.

