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'Cascades' by Sandra Douglas, at Flatrocks Gallery

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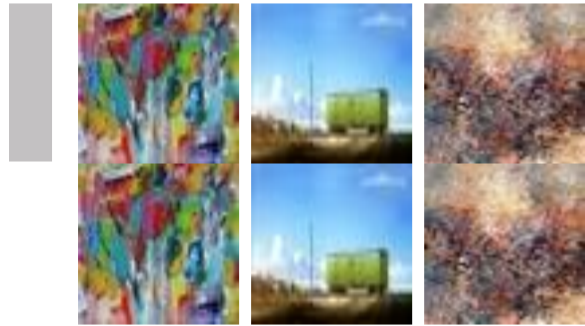
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By Keith Powers / Correspondent

Posted May. 11, 2016 at 3:15 PM

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If you go...

Peter Lyons

American Spring

Trident Gallery, 189 Main St., Gloucester

Through May 30

www.tridentgallery.com, 978-491-7785

Chromatic

Works by Sandra Douglas, Stephen Bates, Nate

Longcope

Flatrocks Gallery, 77 Langsford St., Lanesville

Through June 5

www.flatrocksgallery.org, 978-879-4683

Why Abstract

The Art of Imagination

Cultural Center of Rocky Neck, 6 Wonson St., East Gloucester

Through May 30

www.rockyneckartcolony.org, 978-515-7004

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Admission: Free at all three galleries

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Rocky Neck

A group show at the Cultural Center at Rocky Neck, Why Abstract, on view through May 30, claims to show only abstract works. The show is generally strong, and several works, especially those from Maria Malatesta and Ed Touchette, are unforgettable. What surprises is the mainly direct connection between abstract images and the “real” behind them.

Malatesta’s two “Field” series paintings (#26, #27), acrylic on paper, are full of air and atmosphere. The canvases don’t “abstract” the image of a field of flowers, but capture a field as if it were made of the stuff we breathe. We recognize that it’s a field, but we could also inhale it, almost hear it.

Touchette’s two acrylics, “Phototaxis” and “Day Sailors,” invite interpretation. Bold lines describe something — something elusive. A bright color highlights. The titles intrigue. There is meaning, or suggestions, and we are invited to offer our ideas.

Other works in the show disappoint. Many of the artists view abstraction simply as intentional inaccuracy. A lobster boat is a lobster boat, even when it’s hazily outlined and the sea is painted orange.

Flatrocks Gallery

Sandra Douglas’s work supplies the substance in Flatrocks Gallery’s “Chromatic,” on view through June 5. Hers are abstractions, where the media and the technique dominate. Ideas — even the very notion of representation — lie far in the background.

There would be no point in trying to describe, or guess at, a representational anchor in Douglas’s acrylics. Large paintings, working the canvas exhaustively in all directions, they bear some obvious titles (“Red,” “Indian Summer”) and some less obvious (“Cascades”).

There are no forms. No signposts. No direction. The paintings burst with energy, like feelings do — with some sense of reason, but no real sense that those reasons matter. You just experience them. And thanks to the integrity, and strong technique, in these paintings, you experience these feelings intensely.

Trident Gallery

Then we come to Peter Lyons’ memorable show, American Spring, at Trident Gallery. Abstraction has nothing to do with it. Lyons leaves reference points for reality everywhere: boxcars, bright sky, architectural clouds, the sharp outline of buildings. But Lyons’s photographically precise oils are largely hesitant, uncertain depictions of the real — despite their crystal clarity.

History looms large. Hopper, the surrealists — really any of the great painters, from Rembrandt to Monet to Lane, for whom the light overwhelmed the idea, and capturing that light became the goal.

Lyons’s work is compelling on so many levels — subject, style, the almost tender anachronisms, and, in a strange way, the complete transparency of the artist. Everything depicted is a human construct — even the clouds look calibrated — but there’s not a human anywhere. Not even the human artist, whose very brush strokes get cloaked in these intensely perfected compositions.

Abstraction? Not a bit. But there is little certainty in Lyons’s austere, crisp views of America — and thus more to be gained from simply being in their presence. On view through May 30. Don’t miss it.

Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media newspapers and WBUR’s ARTery. Follow @PowersKeith; email to keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com

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