

Vibrant Colors Alighted by Emotion in Paintings by Karl H. Szekiolda at William Ris Gallery

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by Pat Rogers

The abstract paintings are bold. Bright aquas blend with midnight blues, brushed smoothly across large expanse of canvas. Drips of black paint seem to stream from craters of brown punctuated with dazzles of rich red. Still other paintings draw the eye with oranges and shades of yellow which liberally mingle with greens, pinks and blues seemingly atop shades of brown and cream.

Vivid or dramatic colors are a constant in the exhibition “Karl H. Szekiolda: SPACE & COLOR” on view at William Ris Gallery in Jamesport, NY. Heading into its final weekend, the solo show is the painter’s first at the North Fork gallery. A selection of paintings will continue to be available at the gallery after the solo show closes on Sunday, June 16, 2019.

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“Bali” by Karl H. Szekiolda. Oil on canvas, 48 x 24 inches. Courtesy William Ris Gallery.

In addition to the compelling draw of color in the works on view, the paintings present the opportunity for exploration for viewers. Art work on view represent several series and reveal the artist’s range as he makes paintings primarily influenced by emotion and “what happened” in the course of his life, Szekiolda explained. Depending on how the muse alights, Szekiolda adapts his color palette, textural choices and painterly techniques to reflect the emotional landscapes that inspired the oil paintings on canvas.

This penchant for making bold paintings and allowing his emotive compass steer his process is subtly evident in the art on view in “SPACE & COLOR.” An examined look at the paintings selected reveal a distinct point of view and a flow between the series selected in the art show.

Easily grabbing my eye were three paintings featuring striking compositions with a dynamic sense of motion. A look at the wall labels revealed all bore titles with “Morricone” as lead, referring to the Italian composer whose music became well-known through American Western movies.



“Morricone I” by Karl H. Szekiolda. Oil on canvas, 60 x 48 inches.
Courtesy William Ris Gallery.

In a subsequent phone interview, Szekiolda explained that he heard Morricone’s work performed while he was working in the United Nation years ago. He and his wife, Aurora, have records of his movie soundtracks. After listening to them recently in their Hampton Bays home, he became moved by the music and took to his studio to capture his reactions in oil on canvas.

Despite my wanting to tie the colors and energy to Westerns I watched as a child on television, Szekiolda explained the paintings aren’t meant to reflect dusty travels on horseback undertaken by actor Clint Eastwood as a Western Cowboy or to any literal depiction of American exploration or untamed lands described in history. Yet, the paintings felt as if the surfaces were fully explored in both bold and subtle ways as if to say no stone was left unturned, unnoticed or unexplored in all three of the paintings.

Prominent in "SPACE & COLOR" are paintings making use of aqua as dominate color. Most of the works were inspired by months spent living in the Bahamas, he explained. Looking from the window of their apartment, the ocean beckoned with the colors and conditions interplayed between sky, clouds and sea changing on a dime. In this series, surfaces of the paintings are smooth and seem to connect seamlessly with the gallery's furnishings and architectural details found in surrounding the gallery's windows and walls.



"Carib" by Karl H. Szekiolda. Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 inches. Courtesy William Ris Gallery.

"I didn't want to interpret the sky and ocean in a cliché way," he said of the Bahama paintings on view. "That's why there is no horizon line and they are completely abstract. Still, one looks for the horizon line. The sea and the bottom of the sky; it was impressive. I could have looked all day, every day, and been happy."

In a new series of large paintings at his studio—still inspired by his time in the Bahamas—Szekiela threw his reservations aside and decided to paint a distinct horizon line in each in order to continue exploring the emotive aspects of living oceanside beneath a Caribbean sky.

The exhibition also presents paintings that feature strong textural sections that could seem as distinct as raising mountain ranges rising from the earth's topography viewed from the sky or maybe even space. None of the paintings on view carry a direct visual connection to his time as a scientist interpreting satellite images for NASA, he said.



“Lift” by Karl H. Szekiela. Oil on canvas, 48 x 30 inches. Courtesy William Ris Gallery.

No matter the inspiration, it is his emotional compass that steers the paintings from blank canvases into distinct compositions, he said.

Born in Germany and a longtime resident of the Hamptons, Szekiolda studied art in Berlin before earning a Doctorate in Science from the University of Aix-Marseille in France. He received a Fellowship working under NASA interpreting satellite images. He later was a Senior Fellow at the United Nations heading the Remote Sensing Unit and interpreted space images.

This training is woven subtly into his art making but does not drive it, he said. Experiencing life and expressing it in his painting is the driver for this prolific painter.

His training as an oceanographer does offer Szekiolda the ability to naturally see in three-dimension and interpret colors influenced by scientific theories and practices, he said. In a series of paintings in his studio, he embraces this ability by creating paintings with textural sections that are designed to be viewed with 3-D glasses, he said. Not necessarily easy on the eyes, the painting series are a part of his art practice and something he plans to continue exploring.

"I paint the emotional expression in the work is what I feel," Szekiolda said. "It's a scale of emotion...Every day is different, and you never know what will happen."



"Don Quixote" by Karl H. Szekiolda. Triptych oil on canvas, 48 x 90 inches overall, 49 x 30 inches each panel. Courtesy William Ris Gallery.

Another body of work in his studio was recently inspired by his experience of making art with his grandchildren. Observing their unfettered scribbles and color choices is leading Szekiolda to channel the joy he felt in their company and watching the ways they make art.

Of the selections in the "SPACE & COLOR," Szekiolda expressed admiration for the choices made by curator and gallery director Mary Cantone. His studio is filled with paintings that could have presented a variety of visual focuses, he explained. He and Cantone both feel satisfied that Szekiolda's debut solo show introduces art lovers to a cross section of his current work.



“Cali” by Karl H. Szekiolda. Oil on wood, 56 x 33 inches. Courtesy William Ris Gallery.

Taken with the bright colors and wanting new work, Cantone said she curated the show to combine the vibrancy of the colorful Caribbean paintings with paintings that channel his scientific background and their unique influence.

“Karl Szekiolda is a wonderful painter and is completely unique,” she said in an interview at the gallery. “I think he’s a real find. He’s been living in the Hamptons for years and has been under the radar; until now. I’m looking forward to continue presenting his art and exposing his work to people interested in abstraction and quality contemporary art.”

BASIC FACTS: “Karl H. Szekiolda: SPACE & COLOR” is on view May 25 to June 16, 2019 at William Ris Gallery is located at 1291 Main Road, Jamesport, NY 11947. www.williamris.com. Click [here](#) to see some of the paintings on view.

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