
We are extremely fortunate to have the critically acclaimed artist, Jim Waid as the fourth person to participate in our Distinguished Visiting Artist program. He will be in residence in the School of Art from September 29 – November 1, 2002. Previous artists in the program have included Joe Andoe, Roger Sprague and Fritz Scholder.

With the support, assistance and cooperation of Dr. Eric Lee, Director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, we are concurrently presenting an exhibition of Mr. Waid’s recent body of work on display from October 3 – December 15, 2002. The exhibition includes a number of spectacularly colorful, large paintings as well as a few pastels on paper.

In Waid’s visit and exhibition has been made possible with the enthusiastic and generous support of Mr. And Mrs Jerome Westheimer who not only have enthusiastically supported Mr. Waid’s visit and exhibition, but also suggested that Mr. Waid would be a great candidate for the Distinguished Visiting Artist residency. Their support for Mr. Waid’s visit is only the most recent manifestation of their extremely generous support for the visual arts at the University of Oklahoma where they have provided critical assistance to both the School of Art and the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art for many years.

Also supporting Mr. Waid’s residency are President David L. Boren and his wife Molly who provided the initial support for the Distinguished Visiting Artist Program and have continued with their dedication and support, not only for the visual arts, but for the performing arts as well. The School of Art deeply appreciates their often expressed feelings that the arts are integral and important to higher education.

Additionally, our thanks to Dr. Marvin L. Lamb, Dean of the College of Fine Arts for his assistance and encouragement.
Waid's paintings are, quite simply: big, bold and bursting with color. "Organic abstractions" is a term used to describe Jim Waid's paintings, but that may be an oversimplification. Or perhaps it is simply an understatement, since his paintings are much more complex than that. His work is filled with an energy that literally overflows the surface. Waid is a desert dweller who paints lush, imaginary landscapes filled with verdant vegetation in desert hues, creating a fecund, tropical presence.

The paintings are of plants, flowers, rocks, stones and other natural objects, sometimes recognizable, but other times only hinting of their natural ancestry. The forms in Waid’s work are always organic, although frequently spiky and pointed, with a geometry that is abstracted from nature rather than copied, creating a surrealistic persona, laden with other psycho, sexual overtones.

Regarding that, Waid's work expands on those fundamental premises of the New York School of Abstract Expressionists that developed by way of Gorky, Pollack, DeKooning and other pioneering American artists in the late 1940's and early 1950's. We are not talking about that much beloved unity of surface that the later Abstract Expressionists so admired and persued with a zealotry resembling the quest for the Holy Grail, but rather about the lack of illusion and the celebration of the sensuous potential, glory and reality of the paint itself. When this happens as it does so brilliantly in Waid's work, we recognize that the artist is first and foremost exploring the possibilities of the medium itself instead of trying to make paint appear to be something that it is not. This primary tenent of the Abstract Expressionists allowed them to develop an extraordinarily poetic visual vocabulary of paint in their art. In the best of Abstract Expressionist work there was an absolute purity of the painterly poetics so the paint itself became complete both as image and as vehicle, and allowing painters to create glorious odes and paens to paint's expressive possibilities. Waid's work often succeeds in achieving that same quality, placing him on a level with the universally acknowledged masters such as DeKooning, Rothko and Still.

In these paintings Waid's abstract expressionistic origins are clearly apparent (and acknowledged), however the roots of abstract expressionism are much deeper than just the New York School and thus, it seems to more completely understand his work, we should recognize that it is the surrealists from whom most (not all) of
the Abstract Expressionists are spiritual descendents. This is the emotional foundation of Waid’s work. However, this influence is not to meant to imply that Waid’s work does not adhere to most of the primary Abstract Expressionist principles about surface. Waid’s surfaces are always replete with gestural painterly handiwork that is sponged, stippled, scraped, painted and filled with spontaneous movement, as well as the visible history of its own creation.

But Waid has reached back to the progenitors of abstract expressionism. He shares roots with those artists whom Andrew Carduff Ritchie, in his 1951 book and catalog of the exhibition, Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America, placed in the category of “Expressionist Biomorphic” (Gorky, DeKooning, Rothko, Pollack and others). As a result, there remains, even in his current paintings with their hints of the preconceived naturalistic forms, a great deal of the surreal imagery that one finds in those classic American abstract painters mentioned above. A phrase that Frank O’Hara used in his writings on Jackson Pollock comes to mind here:

“The basic theory of Surrealism is a far greater liberation from the restrictions of pre-conceived form than any amount of idiosyncratic experimentation,...”

That certainly seems true when viewing Waid’s paintings as it seems certain that most of his imaginary, lush, densely colored landscapes and gardens do not exist in this world, not in the Sonora desert area around his Tucson, Arizona home and studio nor anywhere except in the prolific, fertile mind of the artist. Some, like King Canyon, clearly come out of the desert landscape. But others like Birdland, Chinese Tallow, Eden, Pannonica and Kistimne have uncertain geographical origins and are only specific in the artist’s imagination. Yet, in his paintings they are believable places and plants and we join the painter in his evolutionary discovery of those magnificent, yet surreal forms; in the sensuous structures he has created, and we take pleasure in the way the artist has allowed us to partake of their creation while simultaneously marveling at how much artistry and magic has gone into their creation and in the way they now dazzle and beguile our eyes.
Bio-morphic imagery, abstract figuration, are other art terms that also might be used to describe the work of Waid. Transcendental is still another.

"I'm not copying what I'm seeing in nature, but trying to understand the process to see if they can be put to a painterly use."

That statement by Mr. Waid in reference to some earlier work still seems to be largely true in the work displayed in this exhibition. However, in this exhibition, there are hints of a rediscovered naturalism, of a landscape more closely aligned to nature than has been apparent in most of Waid's previous work that was more obviously abstract.

Box Canyon and Vol, in particular are quite naturalistic in some ways. Never the less, these paintings are clearly a vision of the artist's eye cast upon the landscape impressionistically, creating a sense of that landscape unbound. The natural world is coupled to the artist's eye and creates a magical wonder and beauty beyond that which exists in nature. Are these inconsistent with his other, more abstract, surreal, transcendental and poetic interpretations? No. As Waid says:

"There is a very direct connection with things outside. I do a lot of looking; a lot of hiking. Besides the things growing around us, I look at books and magazines that show scientific ways of imaging information, all the way from molecular structure to what I can see around me—anything that makes some connection inside me—where I think I can use that, or I think it should be used. It's all a very intuitive process, and I keep looking and looking. I'm very much trying to get a sense of nature..."

That said, we should restrain ourselves and not overindulge in the analytical process. While analysis can give us some intellectual insights or historical perspective, it is the paintings themselves that give us pleasure. So, we should return to looking at the paintings themselves. As Waid says, "I keep looking and looking."

Contemplate the painterly forms, and enjoy those direct expressions of delight the artist so cheerfully serves up on his canvases. His paintings are a feast for the eye. Enjoy them and celebrate the glory of painting!
Vel; acrylic on canvas; 66 x 84; 1999
Eden; acrylic on canvas; 108 x 120"; 1999
Jim Waid was born in Elgin, Oklahoma in 1942. He attended the University of Oklahoma Laboratory School in Norman, Oklahoma before moving to Carlsbad, New Mexico. He later lived in Portales, N.M. where he graduated from high school and took a part-time job as a radio announcer. For the next five years he worked off and on at radio stations and in 1961 transferred to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque where he received his first instruction in painting. He completed his BFA in 1965, and moved to New York City later that year where he worked as an insurance investigator, continued painting and explored the New York art museums and galleries. It was at that time that he began creating color field paintings as well as becoming interested in the formalist theories of Clement Greenberg.

In 1968 he and his family (wife Beverly Ann, daughter Anne, and son Paul) moved to Tucson where he entered graduate school at the University of Arizona and his son Gregory was born in 1969. Following graduation in 1971 he accepted a faculty position at Pima Community College in Tucson where he remained until 1980 when he resigned to paint full time. Since 1980, he has lived and worked in Tucson, exhibiting nationally and internationally in group and solo exhibitions.

Jim Waid is represented by the Riva Yares Gallery in Scottsdale, Arizona.

NOTES
1 Ritchie, Andrew Carduff; Abstract Painting and Sculpture in America, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, 1951
2 O’Hara, Frank; Jackson Pollock, George Braziller, Inc, New York, NY, 1959
3 Jim Waid, Organic Tapestries, exhibition catalog, Rockwell Museum and Art Center, Roswell, NM, 1999
4 Ibid

CREDITS:
Text: Dr. Andrew Phelan
Design: Eric H. Anderson
Printing: ou Printing Services