

Strong work explores variations of 'Abstraction'

By **NADINE WASSERMAN**, Special to the **Times Union**

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Modernist, Minimal, Geometric, Expressionist, Op, Pop, Hard-edge, Color Field, Post-painterly, Neo-Expressionist, Neo-Geo. Each of these art trends fits under the broader title "Abstract Art." And while abstraction has antecedents that go all the way back to cave paintings, the umbrella term generally refers to a direction in art that began with Modernism and has continued to develop through the various iterations above.

On display in the exhibition "Legacies of Abstraction" are examples of contemporary abstract art. Made by three different artists, these accomplished drawings, paintings and prints each convey a particular approach to abstraction.

Theresa Chong uses a mix of traditional Asian aesthetics and new techniques to create transcendent compositions on Japanese rice paper. Chong's intricate webs of lines punctuated by small squares are either black on white ground or white on deep blue-black ground. Her lines overlap in clusters reminiscent of neural synapses or electric circuit boards. While the images are computer-generated, the actual mark making is done by hand with gouache and pencil. Some of Chong's titles, such as "Cantabile," "Tarantella" and "Delacroix," refer to music or art, but her intricate images are open to interpretation. They appear spontaneous and unpredictable while seeming to follow a complex logic.

Whereas Chong relies on a limited pallet, Warren Isensee uses vibrant and vivid colors to explore the expressive possibilities of abstraction. Like Chong, Isensee is interested in the handmade mark. His drawings not only communicate his focus as he puts pencil to paper, but they betray the limitations of his own hand. On close inspection, his edges are less exact than they initially appear. His candy colors are both spirited and cheerful, yet they are incongruous with his technical restraint. Ultimately, the way he blends Pop colors with Hard-edge style makes the work feel like both tribute and satire.

Katia Santibañez is more interested in the grid than in individual lines. Her verticals and horizontals pulse and vibrate. Rather than basic geometric shapes, she uses organic forms inspired by saplings, ferns, vines, and roots. These unruly curves and waves threaten to disrupt the orderly pattern of the grid and subvert foreground and back-ground. Santibañez's paintings, drawings, and etchings are studies in contrast. They expose the tension that exists between the rational and the chaotic, between culture and ature.

"Legacies of Abstraction" contains some strong work, but it is not entirely clear why these artists are being shown together or why exactly they demonstrate a legacy. Other than the fact that they are represented by the same gallery there is no

indication of what exactly connects the art. The audience for this exhibition would have been better served by more explicitly exploring the thematic and aesthetic connections among these particular works.