

The Longwood Center for the Visual Arts

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*Jill Krutick: Nature Reimagined*

In all of artist Jill Krutick's magical paintings there is a visual common denominator of abstracted interpretive and intuitive compositions that get their cue from an outside viewpoint looking inward, often toward our environment and the heavens above. In this latest series of works, she also finds a connection and inspiration in green hillsides, purple mountain tops and on occasion, correlations to a lake's reflective surface below. Krutick is an explorer of natural beauty; certainly, here is an artist who is a dedicated and passionate observer of colors, forms and textured surfaces wherever she may journey. In many of the new paintings on view at the Longwood Center for the Visual Arts in Farmville, Virginia, she trades a traditional walking stick for a sturdy paintbrush that steers the viewer along a delightful ambulatory illustrated pathway as she documents her spontaneous and imaginative configurations on canvas. Krutick's works are power packed with an assortment of acrylic swirls and curls, radiant amoebas and splashes of artistic energy that offer subtle and lyrical portrayals of the heaven and earth in an abstract expressionist playground of disparate forms and color fields. Perhaps not so coincidental is the aesthetic influence and motivation the surrounding area offers to artists and photographers as well as those who travel the famous hiking and horseback trails in the vicinity of the museum. Settled between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains, the area is best known for its stunning native splendor that stretches nearly 200 miles across the mountain tops frequently referred to as "The Big Valley," which has been immortalized in song, dance, film and television, and on canvas.

Krutick's genuine affection towards biological forms and colors that can be delicately incorporated into her multi-layered creations and the handmade chemistry between her unique interpretation of nature and the expressionist luminosity invented sets her work apart. The singular palette she painstakingly has developed is delightfully evident in her most recent paintings and depicts a passion for the environment and celebrates its survival and inherent beauty. Hard effort and experimentation have paid off handsomely as the artist has enhanced her own personal signature for moving forward with consistency and harmony. With a knack for crafting a swirling base of lush colors or harmonious shades of gray, Krutick seems to gain encouragement and perhaps recollection from bold characteristics or hue synchronizations that might have appeared once as a far-off hillside in autumn. Or you may discover a picture where a combination of painted lines might suggest a dramatic satellite map-like viewpoint that incorporates oblique references to wandering roadways or meandering rivers, or aerial view of square quilt-like patches of lush farmland, or perhaps the vague outline of a small rural town. Krutick fashions a duality of perspectives that when merged presents an attractive hybrid of pure abstraction with hints

of pictorial references whether urban or country—or outer space for that matter—the final connection or interpretation options are left up to the observer.

Krutick also is an idiosyncratic master of heavily white canvases that often support explosive bursts and gusts of irregular spins and loops reminiscent of the marks on an ice-skating rink or the dramatic twists and turns of a roller coaster. To achieve these impasto patterns, she first lays down a raised foundation of molding paste and other acrylic mediums such as soft gel or granular acrylic textures with an intuitive eye and hand coordination, though purposely without a plan of action that makes her artistic journey more engaging and ultimately more challenging and satisfying for her as well as the viewer. One needs to consider and appreciate that Krutick begins without a blueprint or detailed design in mind when she stands in front of a completely blank stretched white canvas, determined to extemporaneously add a base of textured sections that eventually will work together in harmony. By the time it is finished, the work will be completely covered in multiple layers of paint applied with splashes and dashes as each gesture works cooperatively towards the ambitious task of pulling together disparate marks until an artistic accord is established and the ‘footprints’ for a creative plan of action are realized. Sometimes a viewer can discern an integral and deliberate rhythmic sensibility that may have originated from the artist’s earlier experiences as a piano player.

Of all the delightful images on view, the painting titled “Shenandoah River,” named after the famous waterway located in the western part of Virginia, seems to encompass all the enchanted spirits of Krutick’s recent compositions with its hazy tones of liquid blues alongside a sandy bank, which present an equal balance of solids and liquids, darks and lights, accented with smooth and rough surfaces. Topped off with color wheel complementary opposites, which the artist cleverly has concocted and nestled in a perfectly proportional square, this painting is the leader of a big band of parading paintings.

In “Mystical Night,” Krutick takes on the challenging task of depicting a scene nearly devoid of light, effectively capturing the subtle magic and mystery of an evening spent surrounded by an impenetrable evergreen jungle. “Crayon Forest” has an effortless compatibility to this series examining the allure of trees, and in this oil and acrylic the artist adds a bit of post-cubism to its components.

Another notable painting is “Gemstones,” which portrays a collection of organic forms perhaps worn smooth by time, which have a reflective transparent quality as if one looked down at the sandy bottom of a shallow riverbed. Investigating a bit deeper, we discover Krutick’s ‘underwater’ paintings that are inspired by the natural charm of a brook trout’s scales, where she has zeroed in for a close up on the distinctive motif of a native species that swims in over 3,500 miles of Virginian streams and reservoirs. Other paintings on view commemorate the appeal of abstracting an intriguing expression of the world that surrounds us.

It is also important to note that every artist cultivates their own personal approach to painting, which has been acquired through trial and error, a process all artists must master. Most artists who work in a

narrative context regularly outline out a plan of action first on a small scale in a sketchbook, then produce a series of studies that maintain a well-proportioned and pleasingly planned arrangement in advance so that the visual message is clear and concise from the first dab of pigment. However, in the case of Jill Krutick, she improved her own unique operating methods through a rigorous trial and error experimental process, and eventually as the years went on, she was able to perfect a seemingly freewheeling vigorous platform on canvas that consisted of built-up surfaces. Without a preconceived notion of what the end result might be, like Willem de Kooning, the godfather of abstract expressionism, Krutick starts with intuition and the ability to amplify a stimulating foundation for “constructing” a commanding canvas from the bottom up.

It is apparent from the dramatic and memorable qualities of this selection of works that Jill Krutick is an artist on the fast track whose dedication and studio skills have paid invaluable dividends both in terms of invention and overall expertise. It is no accident that the art community is paying attention, with Krutick receiving positive reviews by some of the leading art critics in America. This exhibition at the Longwood Center for the Visual Arts was curated with the goal of presenting a diverse variety of paintings that are representative of the artist’s development. It is noteworthy that this exhibition, the third museum show in as many years for Krutick, recognizes artistic ingenuity, growth and a professional maturity that is clearly well earned. This accomplishment by itself is an astonishing feat for a mid-career artist who only began a full-time serious pursuit of painting not long ago when she began to dissect the grand tradition of mixing abstract expressionism with color field compositions that were a creative challenge to reconfigure into a recognizable brand of her own. Judging by the splendid works on display, the future for Jill Krutick looks bold and bright and successful—just like her paintings.