

Arts&Entertainment



MIRANDA ELLIOTT

Landscape photographs cover a wall in Joan Elliott's North Side studio. The photographs also function as reference materials or inspiration for a geometric shape.

BEHIND THE SCENE

ELLIOTT'S EXHIBIT SHINES LIGHT ON INFRASTRUCTURE IN HER WORK

BY MARTHA MABEY
Special correspondent

“Wired” is not the title you would normally associate with an exhibition of landscapes. However, when Richmond artist Joan Elliott selected that name for her November show at the Reynolds Gallery, she hoped it would lead her viewers to look beyond

beautiful images of slender trees, still streams, mysterious forests and luminous skies.

“I wanted to direct people to the process,” Elliott says, “namely the intense line work embedded in the painted surface” — what she calls

the infrastructure — “rather than the imagery itself.”

Elliott creates her landscapes on birch panels stretched with canvas and covered with layers of gesso and paint. Leaves resemble tiny gold coins. Branches are reminiscent of delicate ferns in an antique botanical drawing.

Most artists would stop there. But not Elliott. When the surface is dry she scratches thin lines with a palette knife, crossing the painted surface again and again, until a delicate web of etched marks abrades the entire painting.

Through this nearly invisible web of surface work, traditional landscapes are transformed into something else. “I’m pretty ruthless with the surface,” Elliott says, “which is why it has to be rigid. The surface is its skin; it’s a very physical process similar to etching on a copper plate.”

Elliott’s love of drawing, and the “chancy” result when a spontaneous line leads her hand across a flat surface, plays a significant role in her current work.

Although she does not cite abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock, her lined surfaces are dynamic, vigorous, abstract and deceptively spontaneous like Pollock’s drip paintings.

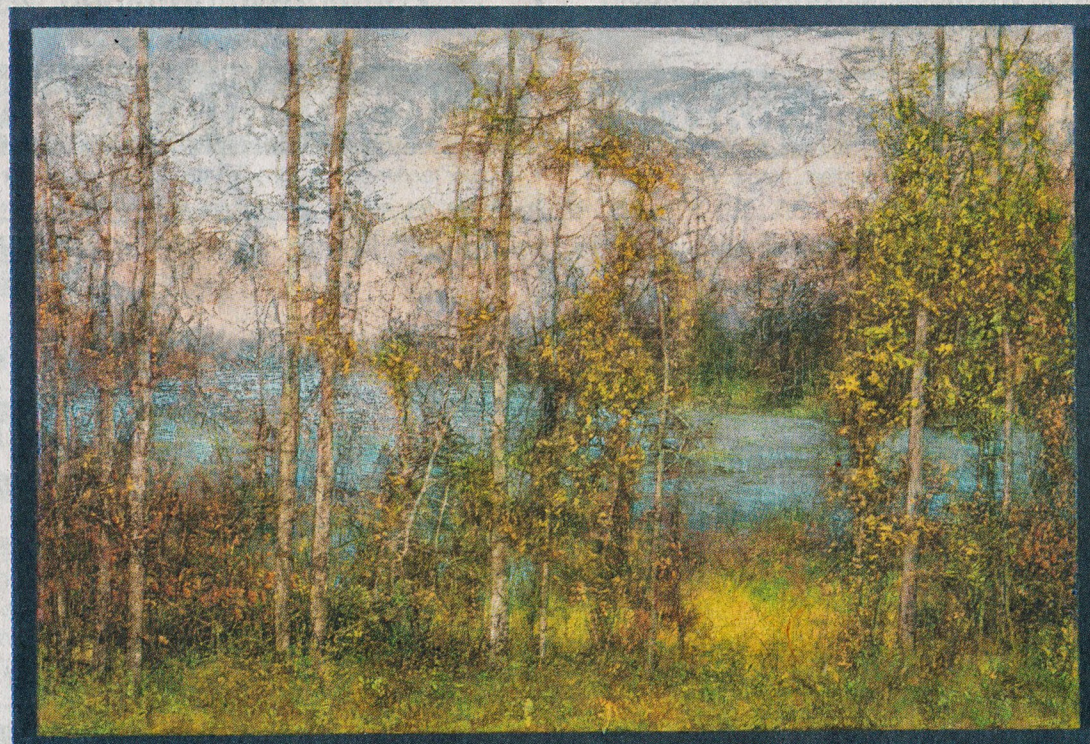
Art dealer Beverly Reynolds sees Elliott’s recent paintings as “looser, more atmospheric, increasingly



“Immersion,” by Richmond artist Joan Elliott. Her show “Wired” will be at the Reynolds Gallery.



Elliott’s “Wired” is seen here. Elliott creates her landscapes on birch panels stretched with canvas.



Elliott, whose work “Tremble” is seen here, scratches lines on the surface, creating a web of marks.

entangled with line — a profound body of work.” Though based in landscape, Reynolds adds that Elliott’s work “transcends the simple definition of the genre. The locations are not specific, but drawn from a combination of memories and psychological reactions.”

Dozens of color photographs of landscapes cover an entire wall in Elliott’s North Side studio. In her paintings, she combines elements from these photos with what she sees in her mind.

The photographs also function as reference materials for a specific color or inspiration for a geometric shape that emerges when she introduces a stand of trees.

“I’m visually obsessed with landscapes,” she says. “When I find something that works I keep at it. At the same time, the paintings are becoming more abstract.”

When you hold one of Elliott’s paintings at a certain angle you can see the resulting complexity as well as surprising patches of color peeking through the layers of paint that have been scraped. Then unexpectedly, you are looking at an abstract painting.

It’s why she’d like to think of something to call them besides landscapes.

However Elliott’s paintings are viewed, the work is a slow process. It can take three months to a year to complete the layering and meticulous image before she is ready to begin the surface line work that transforms a painting into something abstract.

Elliott, a painting instructor at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for 20 years, works on several paintings at a time. The show at the Reynolds Gallery is two years’ worth of work and Elliott’s third solo show there since the 1980s.

‘Wired’

When: Nov. 2 to Dec. 22

Where: Reynolds Gallery, 1514 W. Main St.

Info: (804) 355-6553 or www.reynoldsgallery.com

Number of paintings in the show: 16

Price range: \$2,400 to \$5,000