

‘Unbridled optimism’



Searching for Fresh Air by Ray Burggraf is part of new show opening Dec. 7 at Venvi Art Gallery. BRINDA PAMULAPATI

COLOR AND THEME POP IN RAY BURGGRAF'S BLUES SKIES EXHIBIT

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Council on Culture & Arts

World-renowned artist and color theorist Ray Burggraf takes note of the water towers he passes by on long drives. No matter the shade of blue or purple or green paint, the colors never quite come together to match the sky and camouflage the structures. He admires the ones that come close however.

Burggraf has spent the majority of his career painting the world he sees in prismatic color. His skyward gaze is distinct and unique in “Blue Skies — New Works and Revisions,” his fall exhibition at Venvi Art Gallery. Re-examining his past work and introducing new works, Burggraf’s abstract color constructions are placed in realistic landscapes, sometimes floating above the clouds. He says Blue Skies is a nod to both the Frank Sinatra tune and a thematic feeling that is evident in the body of work.

“I would say it’s unbridled optimism,” says Burggraf. “We haven’t seen that in this country in a long

time but there it is.”

Burggraf reaches as far back as 1820 when it comes to finding that optimism. Inspired by the Hudson River School artists, he admires Frederic Church’s ability to work large and expansively. These artists saw early America as “a place of sublime beauty,” and through his own lens, Burggraf works to achieve that same emotional state.

He sees similar themes in painter Edward Hopper’s view of America in the 1940s, particularly with “August in the City,” a painting of a nude woman looking out the window with great excitement. The woman is inside a small apartment gazing at the unseen, and what the viewer could only guess as being the colors, shapes and forms of her surroundings.

“That’s where the life is, it’s outside,” says Burggraf. “It’s going on somewhere else. You can’t see it in the picture but you follow it. That’s real optimism. It’s knowing that around the corner there is going to be

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If you go

What: Ray Burggraf: Blue Skies – New Works and Revisions

When: First Friday Opening, 5-8 p.m. Dec. 7. Gallery open 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m., Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays and 1-5 p.m. on Saturdays through Dec 15.

Where: Venvi Art Gallery, 2901 E Park Avenue, Suite 2800

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information please call 850-322-0965 or visit <http://www.venviartgallery.com/>.

Burggraf

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something incredible.”

Growing up on a farm in Ohio, Burggraf spent much of his youth outside. Saturated in nature, the colors that surrounded him eventually bled into his work as an artist. Burggraf studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art where he established mentors influenced by the Bauhaus, a German art school that combined crafts with fine arts. His fundamental teachers, Josef Albers and Julian Stanczak formed the basis of how Burggraf thinks about and theorizes color.

“Stanczak was an optical artist,” says Burggraf. “[He’d place] very small units of color one against another usually in lines. The colors would dance and vibrate and cause all kinds of auras to happen.”

An Emeritus Professor of Fine Arts at Florida State University, Burggraf’s paintings have been coined as color constructions in national and international exhibitions. He ascribes the word “musical” to his process of sequencing color. Taking in his natural surroundings, Burggraf transforms this visual input into colored pencil thumbnail sketches before turning to his acrylic paints and wood. He prefers acrylics for their forgiving nature and vibrant color, and paints on units of wood to create varied gradations.

While he primarily works with wood to give shape and form to his paintings, for “Blue Skies” Burggraf also utilizes Plexiglas to give the illusion of floating, upward momentum. He enjoys working with this canvas, a fluid assembly of wood where bits of one color are crushed or complemented by slabs or slivers of another.

“If you put down one color it’s nothing, but if you put down two colors they start to interact,” he explains. “The very definition of color is dependent upon how you organize and put them together.”

In his latest artistic shift, Burggraf is drawn to the waxy, smooth character of colored pencils. The twelve drawings he considers to be the heart of the show at Venvi are arranged throughout the gallery to give this blend of old and new works a sense of retrospective. “Searching for Fresh Air,” a painted banner commissioned for the 2002 Korea World Cup hangs in faded glory alongside the bleached, summery palette of pieces like “Sun Blasted.”

As an avid supporter of local galleries, Burggraf is appreciative of the work that Venvi Art Gallery has done in Tallahassee. He is looking forward to seeing how the community receives his work, which will have a second opening on December’s First Friday and stay on display through Dec. 15.

The sharp peaked waves of “Dolphin Day” greet visitors when they first walk in. The piece’s shifting color scheme is another new addition to Burggraf’s repertoire as he continues to experiment with color, surfaces, and light.

“To me that’s the way life is,” says Burggraf. “Nothing stays the same. It’s not all just looking out the window and there it is. It’s just one impression after another after another.”