

January 18, 2001

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Local News

Waterworks exhibit a study in contrasts

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Danielle Garland's abstract paintings rush from oversized canvases in black and neutral tones and brush strokes that define memories of cornfields from her midwestern hometown in Indiana. The paintings fill the walls of the main gallery of the Waterworks Visual Arts Center with waves of emotion.

Those seemingly monstrous representations are complemented and contrasted by installations in the two back galleries, one featuring Karen Parker's "single-hair-on-the-paintbrush" nature paintings. Parker was influenced by her father and his love of nature, she says. Also on display are the "passionate, empowering, intense" oil and objects painted and arranged by Caroline Rust, who strives to explore the fascinating and mysterious "internal self."

These are the women and experiences which make up WVAC's newest exhibition, "Philos." Their works, all obviously extracted from different perspectives, prove true the definition of the word "philos," the "doctrine that no single view of reality can account for the phenomena of life."

The ideas in Garland's abstractions might be unclear to viewers who don't know her work, and it is a style to which she has recently returned.

"Five or six years ago, you wouldn't catch me doing something in which you couldn't recognize the image," said Garland, who holds an M.F.A. in painting from Virginia Commonwealth University. "But I think I've become more involved in the process, my reaction to the paint. A lot of it has to do with emotion that I'm dealing with at the time, and I'm interested in a lot of movement and space. I like to think of my work like poetry in that it kind of gives you a feeling instead of such a specific idea. It's more about the movement than someone trying to get a story out of it. My work used to be really narrative, and I really wanted to tell stories, but I've broken away from that. That's a good thing. It's opened a lot of doors, because now I don't feel like I have to stick to that narration."

- [Home](#)
- [News Index](#)
- [Today's News](#)
- [Editorials](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Classified](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Church Form](#)
- [Club Form](#)
- [Search Site](#)

Garland said she had been doing abstract paintings before her mother was diagnosed with, and later died from, cancer. But after the diagnosis, she went back to the more narrative, “autobiographical,” style of painting.

“It threw my paintings for a complete loop,” she said. “Then, I had sort of a breakthrough when I realized I don’t have to tell the world what’s going on in my life. Before, I felt like I was being a little selfish. Now, they’re more accessible to other people.”

Parker, who earned an M.F.A. in studio painting from Ohio University, also shows work that demonstrates parental influence but is more interested in “how things work ... not through numbers and formulas, but through direct experience and visual interpretation.” Her nearly microscopic representations detail the delicacy of nature’s inhabitants.

“Karen’s work is an intimate approach,” said WVACE Executive Director Denny Mecham. “It’s like looking at some beautiful and exotic scrapbook laid out in a formal way.”

Where Garland’s images are expansive and energetic and Parker’s are delicate and detailed, Rust’s interpretation of life involves a more “sensual” approach to painting.

“I am drawn to the process by the physical characteristics of paint, oil paint, my paint,” Rust said. “With every brush stroke, I experience immense satisfaction. Because paint can be mixed to any chosen hue, value and intensity, color can be used to intensify the psychological impact of an image.”

“I think it’s a great balance,” Mecham said. “People will come in and look at the work and say, ‘I don’t get it,’ but it’s like reading a book: One says, ‘I don’t like it’ and a friend likes it. It’s three different, unique styles, the way three different artists view ‘the phenomena of life.’ ”



“Philos,” featuring paintings by Danielle Garland and installations by Karen Parker and Caroline Rust, opens Jan. 19 and runs through March 11. A reception for the artists Jan. 19 from 6 to 8 p.m. is free and open to the public. On display in the Young People’s Gallery will be work from Rowan County high school students. Gallery hours are Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; Sunday, 1-4 p.m. For more information, call 636-1882.



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