

ARTIST PROFILE

York County's Professional Artists

By Bill Henson

Caroline Rust

I'm always curious as to the foundation that artists build upon and when and where their art started. As Caroline Rust relates, "As a little girl, I wanted to be an artist. It's how I identified myself, and it's been my one constant in life. I took art classes throughout school. But in kindergarten, when they asked us about our three favorite things to do, mine were coloring, playing dress-up, and cleaning." Cleaning? It relates, as she says, to her need to organize and compartmentalize.

Caroline has an organized studio and, in a way, an organization to her art with two distinct, current themes — women and landscapes. And there is often an organization within those themes — she is prone to do series of pieces. She also does commissioned pieces, but these works often are tied more closely to the person commissioning the artwork than with her own focus.

Rust self-defines her paintings as abstracted images and her style as very expressionist to convey a specific feel-

ing. Her abstractions, even though largely non-representational, provide recognizable wisps and enough to prod the viewer into more exploration. Rust might also use images that she has seen about historical women, for example, using extracts from these as the background conversation to which she adds or layers

her interpretations and her interactive feelings. She describes it as both a physical and symbolic layering.

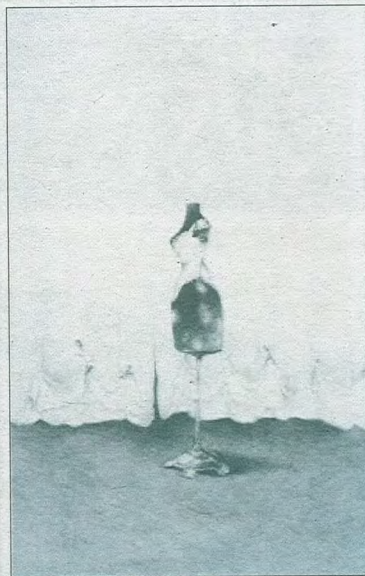
Clockwise at top left: "Balleroy" (France). Caroline Rust. "Energy Within Series" (gallery view). Images provided by Caroline Rust. Photo of Caroline Rust by YC Magazine.



A significant part of her current work is directly inspired by women from the past, often as personalities in historical fiction. "I like their strength. I'm drawn to it. I like the history and emulating it in my work, connecting it to today, the 'me' today and women today."

She wants to enable the viewer's process of interpretation without providing directional bias. "The viewer is free to come to the work with their own viewpoints and feelings," Rust says. "I do put titles on the work to give the

viewer a clue, but my intention isn't forced on the viewer. I simply want to share the work and my feelings." She seems to want her conversation about her feelings, as demonstrated through



Clockwise at top left: "Roman Trees." "Tuscany" (Italy). "Wounds that Never Bleed" (installation view). "Untitled Drawing." "Wedding Dresses; For Mademoiselle Charlotte du Val d'Ognes." Images provided by Caroline Rust.

her art, to continue into the viewer's feelings. A dialogue of thought.

Her woman theme isn't feminist art, and it isn't anti-male. According to Caroline, "It's about the internal power source in all people — the internal strength. Men have it as well, but it's different, and it's different person-to-person." She is working from her perspective. She is seeking her "sense of self," how she defines woman. And she is attempting to transfer the emotional response she has and the energy she feels to the painting and, therefore, to the viewer. "It's important for the viewer to know what inspired me," Rust adds as punctuation.

Rust is asking fundamental questions about the meshing of traditional and

more importantly about the strength and fortitude required. And she is drawn to historical women who displayed those qualities in order to examine different directions, from what was both expected and socially enforced. "Why can't you be a good mother or wife and still be a professional artist or an acclaimed photographer or a business woman? Why can't you compartmentalize them and do them all well? And think of someone, a woman, who wanted to do that 150 years ago," she explains.

Her landscape art is what she calls her "natural art." It often features broad, thick strokes and sharp dabs in a profusion of colors, looking for both the subtle and dramatic changes

non-traditional roles, but

in tones. "This is faster painting. I almost throw the paint at the canvas. It's very physical painting. I walk around, and my elbows are flying. Other artists

afternoon stroll through your mind.

If you put her two current styles — women and landscapes — side-by-side,

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don't like to paint next to me when I do my landscapes," she says with a smile.

Her landscapes visually match the description of her painting style. Broad, open, often on over-sized canvases, with dramatic impact. Good landscapes can sometimes have a near-hypnotic effect on a creative viewer, conveying a strange feeling of familiarity, as these might. They beg for you to step off into them and explore with an af-

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you might actually not see them as from the same artist. They are distinctly different — compartmentalized, and intentionally so. And they serve different purposes from her perspective as the artist. “I’ve been told that I should concentrate on one of my styles, develop it, and largely forget about the other. But I’m not going to do that. Sometimes you have to change the style to match the statement that you want to make.” And she does that with extraordinary skill. She uses her sense of organization.

“My women’s work is more refined. I think about every part, and it’s more deliberate. It requires more to convey the meaning. But the landscape painting sets my artist free. My landscapes are more about the energy and life in nature — the beauty and things that I’m in awe of in nature.” That said, there are some of her landscapes that clearly bridge between her styles with a more sweeping, smoothed, almost mysterious approach, a slight leak in the compartments.

Caroline Rust took art classes from her earliest years. She first taught art at Winthrop University and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte



in the late 1990s. And she is married to an artist with international acclaim. Her experience has clearly made the process and techniques important to her, as is the content. And her skills as an artist enable a strong voice.

This artist has a great deal to say with her art. And she makes powerful statements. She intends for a series of paintings to be more of a paragraph than a single sentence or a word. More of a thought provocation than an explanation. Maybe a conversation between the artist and the viewer.

Caroline is an exceptionally talented

artist who is tremendously involved with her work and the feeling that she wants to convey. And you can make the same statement about virtually every professional artist. Yet, she is more than one artist inside and a multi-dimensional person. And she successfully uses them all. She provides her own answer to her question, “Why can’t you?” Well, obviously, you can.

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Clockwise at top left: “Memories of Ivanhoe” (installation view). “Source of Inspiration; Valcelle Vineyard” (Italy). From the “Fire in the Night Series — Heartscape; Artemisia.” “Between Normandy and Brittany” (France). Images provided by Caroline Rust.



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