

Fryer- Kohles, Jeanne. "History Inspires Master of Brushstroke." *The Columbus Dispatch* 4 Aug. 2002: review of exhibit at Dublin Arts Center, Columbus, OH.

Full text:

Seven large oil paintings by Dana Saulnier, associate professor of art at Miami University, convey the feeling that the artist has plunged into the sea of art's history, emerging with fresh visions of how that history can be reconstituted to serve his own needs.

His works are rich with subtle references to the paintings of old masters such as Peter Paul Rubens and Casper David Friedrich. Superficially, the dominant theme of this exhibition is "figure in landscape." Saulnier's titles, however, reveal a complexity of thought and feeling that gives the work dimension.

A flesh-colored shape bound with hoops of paint, occupies most of the painting *Review of Sighs*; landscape plays a minor role as a compositional clasp that holds the "body" in place. Dabs of black paint appear on the body as if they were afterimages left by the artist's gaze.

Similar paint strokes appear in many of Saulnier's works, sometimes resembling schools of fish or simply intense marks of energy that carry their own mystery.

Saulnier also uses architectural features frequently to add a stabilizing element to his virtuoso brushwork. Slabs of wall in the lower left of *Untitled 401* serve a dual purpose: to call attention to the sliver of river that it partially hides and to curtail the billowing shapes (are they heads?) that beam down from the sky.

As if to contain the scene even more, the artist has placed along the bottom a barrier of elongated shapes, adorning one of them with a triangular red cap.

*Talking and Painting* cradles religious symbols and imagery in a bed of expressive color. A crucifix gleams above a lifeless form, while nearby a dust devil of animated marks hovers like a redemptive spirit.

The artist's most recent work, *A Surround of Living Air*, exceeds the others by virtue of its very free, confident brushwork and a palette of creamy whites, delicate grays, siennas and umbers. This bleached landscape, with its dead trees and rushing water, is redolent of death and regeneration.

In contrast to the dynamics in Saulnier's other paintings, the need to control the fluidity or chaos of an image is nearly gone; only a small rectangle that could pass for grave marker remains, as do the mystical touches of black paint that read as the artist private commemorative marks.

Saulnier's allegorical paintings or tinged with melancholy, a byproduct of remembrance. He has retrieved fragments from the depths of his experience as an artist/teacher and used them to confirm the morality of art as it deflects the savagery of the world.