

Abstract Notes on Creating Abstracts

(Notes from Judy Mayer-Grieve demo, January 2017, written by Nancy Teminski.)

“Judy’s approach to abstract art showed a free form expression that I would like to have. I was inspired to watch her create a piece that she wasn’t afraid to alter as the art evolved. It definitely would be worthwhile to take her workshops.” – Alice Horn

On January 11, 2017, Judy Mayer-Grieve graciously offered the LPAA artists a demo on ‘Abstract Art’. She was seeking to stimulate us and arouse our curiosity and understanding of the art of ‘abstract’. Judy will be doing a two-day workshop in June 23-24, and encouraged us to come and give ‘abstract’ a try.



Judy demonstrates the abstract process



Displaying the ‘could be finished’ piece

Judy’s demo was short but gave us much to think about. She attempted to:

- define ‘abstract’ for us – so important for the brain to be able to create abstract art
- acquaint us with sources of further information on brain function
- suggest artists to study on the subject
- provide an opportunity for us to watch her work as she verbalized her actions, helping us to better understand her approach to doing abstract art

Define Abstract

Judy felt it is important to understand how the brain functions in regards to ‘abstract’ art. She found a better understanding for herself when listening to a Charlie Rose interview with Eric R. Kendel, an Austrian-American neuropsychiatrist. Kendel’s book, *Reductionism in Art and Brain Science: Bridging the Two Cultures* clarified for her how problem solving, through experimenting with the unknown, leads to a deeper understanding of what we see. It led her to understanding the fundamental differences between bottom-up and top-down art.

Bottom-up processing recreates figuratively what the eye sees onto a flat surface, thus following the brain’s rules to extract information from the three dimensional world around us. Top-down processing does not include this reproduction of objects. ‘Abstract’ is non-figurative art.

Abstract art employs top-down processing to stimulate one to interpret what one sees in a totally different way. Abstract art seeks to abandon bottom-up visualization and challenges the artist and the viewer to find a new perspective or truth. It takes one to the unknown and seeks to activate the brain to analyze the visual presentation in a new way, evoking an emotional response. This is a new reality of problem solving and experiment that leads to a deeper understanding.

The artist digs deeper to make new connections and then to depict this new vision, gleaned by top-down processing, to the viewer. Abstract art is not logical or programmed and the viewer responds sometimes with pleasure and sometimes with anger. A response is the goal and whatever it is, is acceptable. The viewer strives to make connections to recognize objects but cannot. The viewer must then view this work in a new way that challenges the brain to evolve and thus the artist has succeeded by extracting a response.

For Further Study

Judy recommended reading Kendel's book and, suggested checking out You Tube and Netflix to look at abstract artists' work. Some names she offered: Gehardt Rickter – high realism years ago – compare to today, Jackson Pollack, Mark Rothwell, Jack Bush, Zasudagan, Ken Hoffman, Emma Lindstrom, glass by Gijoulie, Andy Goldsworthy – work meant to fall apart, etc.

Watching the Demo

Most importantly for artists, Judy wanted us to understand the need to generate positive energy within ourselves to create the top-down artistic flow. Let it flow onto the canvas. She cautioned that once the energy has gone — STOP immediately! And don't start again until energy returns. The minute someone suggests something you need to do for your abstract art, or you yourself go into a 'fix mode' on some part of the work, the energy has gone. STOP work! The mood has been killed. The work should always be whatever you feel, it should never look planned.

Watching her work with all manner of tools (brushes, a squeegee, a credit card, latex gloves, a squirt bottle, etc.,) and a variety of application techniques (smear, spray, dapple, scrape, etc.,) and whatever colour struck her fancy was intriguing and oddly suspenseful. Layer upon layer! Colour upon colour! Shape upon shape! Where was it going? How far will she go? Which way is up?

For me this demo was done before she finished her work. It needed to end because I was already inspired to get at it myself and see how deep I could dive.



“It definitely encouraged me to try it out, and I did one on Wednesday I was actually planning to do some more with it to try out different techniques but a couple of people said they liked it as is so I left it. I am anxious to try some different things on the next one.” – Ron Harrod