

Linda Bastian

Linda Bastian's paintings express an unexpected forcefulness and mystery. They illustrate a recent trend in representational and pattern painting, as well as a strong commitment to historical references. Her imagery is familiar yet it suggests a deeper meaning. The centrality of her compositions is reminiscent of medieval and Renaissance tapestry design, where only two levels of space are established. Foreground shapes, seeming to possess inner energy, force themselves to the very surface of the picture plane. The field explodes with a multitude of small flowers and fauna in a bold variety of brilliant hues. Ribbons of lighter values weave their way around the surface and function to hold the forms within their assigned boundaries.

During a trip to Europe Ms. Bastian found herself spending more and more time and attention on exhibits of decorative arts, such as intricate lace patterns, illuminated manuscripts, textiles and open work porcelain. In their time these art forms reached a larger audience through their assimilation into daily life, and they became generally recognizable subject matter. Many of these traditional designs have been employed by Ms. Bastian as direct sources of patterns for her prints, paintings and drawings.

Ms. Bastian's art reaffirms what is essential for humanness. The flowers, birds and foliage she paints display an opulent sensuality and complexity that is found in nature. Instilled with elegance and grace, blossoming buds and robust blooms burst on the painted surface studded with ornate symbols of regeneration. Ms. Bastian's work is an attempt at expressing a metaphor for life. Her work has the added quality of sensuality which keeps it from being purely decorative. Many of the pieces are nocturnal tableaux, shapes that emanate and glow in the recesses of the imagination. Time and movement have stopped and we can glimpse the mystery that pervades our senses.

In the present day history of art the grids of the minimal type paintings are being transformed into nets of lacy drawn out patterns; naked surfaces are being filled in; lifeless redundancy is being replaced by lively fields that engage the eye as well as the mind. Ms. Bastian's work has a sensuous content that goes beyond self-references and the immediate art context. As a structure and a process, patterning allows for a greater complexity of visual experience, rather than most non-realist imagery. It is helpful to see a new artistic style exist with a historical context because it both continues the past and breaks with it.

Pattern can be a disguise or a camouflage. Those enriching configurations on carpets, wallpaper and textiles can equalize or confuse our comprehension of shape. The seen world is transformed by them into a state of flux. Ms. Bastian has discovered the dissolving and resolving properties of pattern. With it she has created an original fusion of space and pattern.

Ornamental art has been organically linked with culture ever since the dawn of civilization, when the first flower illustrations appeared on walls of caves. Fascinated by their colors and shapes, primitive man drew crude pictures of flowers growing around him. Early civilizations incorporated floral motifs into their cultures as both symbols and decorative elements. Perhaps the most avid of all the societies that used flowers and patterns thematically throughout the centuries has been the Chinese and Japanese. Their celebration of nature was carried over into the most detailed and sensitive rendering of flowers.

For some time now we have felt the need for an art that will acknowledge third world art and those forms and mediums previously referred to as "women's work" ie. batik tapestry, and hand crafted work. Ms. Bastian, along with other women involved in patterning, offers an art that enlivens a sterile environment and offers direct meaning without sacrificing visual sophistication. It is an art that expresses something other than withdrawal, scientism, or the solipsism of recent movements. Patterning represents a new, refreshing and vital art form that incorporates old world craftsmanship with contemporary aesthetic values.

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