ART AS LIFE

FIVE ARTISTS SHARE THEIR JOURNEYS IN EXHIBIT AT PIPPIN CONTEMPORARY

"The Talking House" is an acrylic on canvas with silver leaf by Nancy Reyner.

"Waiting on the Train" is a kiln-formed glass sculpture by Suzanne Wallace Mears.
COURTESY OF PIPPIN CONTEMPORARY

BY KATE MCGRAW
For the Journal

"I've been very lucky. Art has made my life delicious," encaustic painter Alan Soffer said, describing his journey in art. Soffer's work is featured with four other artists in a group show titled "What's This Journey About?" opening today at Pippin Contemporary on Lincoln Avenue.

Aleta Pippin, gallery owner and participating artist, said the question occurred to her while studying her latest work, and it seemed like an appropriate question for artists in mid-career (or maybe a little later) to consider.

"We asked each of the artists, 'What's this journey about?' But we didn't try to influence their answers," Pippin said. "I mean, to me art is a metaphor for life, but we didn't try to make them say that."

Gallery director Kristen Johnson said gathering the art for the show has been a joy. "Once in a while, you meet someone who is inspired by their life and work," Johnson said about Pippin, Soffer, and Rose Masterpol, Nancy Reyner and Suzanne Wallace Mears. "They are totally alive, enthusiastic and care genuinely about what they are doing and the people with whom they work. They express a joy that comes from deep within, not forced or superficial. You feel their genuineness and belief. Their work is consistent with their purpose. They are living on purpose and want to make a difference in the world. This clarity sets them apart."

Aleta Pippin

Pippin, who started in Santa Fe at a cooperative gallery, co-owned Pippin-Meikle for several years, and opened Pippin Contemporary almost two years ago.

"I work in oil and acrylic; I'm working in oil again, the colors are so rich," she said. "For me painting is a metaphor for life. There's so much emotion involved."

Her vivid abstracts are known for their bright colors. "I absolutely do love color, although I've been working

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Art as a Metaphor for Life

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on toning myself down a little, not so much for this show as for my next one," she said.

"There have been so many plateau moments in my career; I guess I'm at a new realization of why I'm doing this. When I evaluate who I am as an artist, it does seem to be my strong suit, the intuitive use of color."

When she started painting, Pippin said, she did much more representational work, "but you need to find it interesting enough to get you in to the studio to work. Abstract work absolutely does that for me. It's about freedom of expression and the use of color."

Rose Masterpol

Masterpol is an abstract expressionist whose work is very layered, which is why she uses acrylic — it dries faster.

As for painting, she said, "I have to do it. I can't stop until I'm in love with it. It can take a year or two. I can look at a painting from 10 years ago and be like, 'Oh, my God, I never saw that.' I grew up in Syracuse, New York. I was just always creative as a child; it went from one thing to the next. At about 14, I was looking at a painting that I did and a voice said, 'You are a painter.' I also was involved with music, playing flute, trumpet and sax. In the 11th grade, I decided to concentrate on fine art. I attended community college, and then studied fine art and commercial art at Syracuse University. Then I went to Cal Arts, and finished school there. I've been painting seriously and having shows since '87. I've been in Los Angeles 25 years, much of that time doing graphic design to support my action as a painter.

"My journey is that I am a creative soul, a creative person on this planet," Masterpol said. "I can't stop; that's just who I am. When you're painting, you're really in two worlds: what you're doing, and what the world perceives and what you give the world. I'm in my own world when I'm painting. I feel like I'm channeling energy from all different places at the same time. I'm not doing it for a specific cause. I just open my Pandora's box, and feel like I'm a flowing energy onto that canvas.

"Then there's the question: 'What do people get?' That's interesting. Passion, color, attention, pain ... all painters probably say the same thing over and over. As a young girl I had a very tough upbringing. Art was my savior, it took me away from what was happening. Because what was happening became very emotional, a lot of what my work is about that, because there's a transference there. I'm very sensitive; I can see somebody in an elevator and just read what's going on with them. People say of my work, 'I *wanta go in and I don't* wanta come out.' That's pretty intense to hear.

"It (life) is a journey," Masterpol said. "Our journey (as artists) is a little different because we're putting ourselves on the line. Everybody has their own judgment on art, especially abstract — because it's abstract. I noticed that in my new work, things started appearing even more. It makes a painting more personal to the viewer. I love that my work is at a point where everybody is seeing and feeling their own stories. It's my journey and I say, 'Here. Have your journey now.'"

Suzanne Wallace Mears

Mears, who is showing her signature kiln-formed glass masks, does paintings, glass, and ceramics. She grew up in Iowa on the Mississippi River and graduated from the University of Iowa with a degree in fine art and art education.

"I headed toward fine art," she said. "Then I moved to Oklahoma City; then lived Europe a while, moved back to Oklahoma, moved to San Francisco, moved to a Colorado ranchette — sheep and llamas. After all this time, I moved back to Oklahoma City in 1998.

"In 2002, I started doing glass to the exclusion of everything else; now I'm back to painting. I'm doing art that I was not doing for so long," Mears said.

She gave a telephone interview after returning from an animal shelter, having just adopted a dog scheduled for euthanasia the next morning. "I couldn't stand it; he's such a nice dog," she said. "If he doesn't fit in here, I'll socialize him and find him a good home. I have two adopted Dalmatians, one cat and a 100-gallon freshwater aquarium. My house is on a double lot in the middle of Oklahoma City with lots of trees; a building in the back houses six kilns.

"I did ceramics for years, had five ceramic kilns. So I've used kilns for forever and I was familiar with how they work and what they do. I don't know what prompted me to wake up one morning and say, 'Now I'll do glass.' I thought I was going to be a whiz kid at it, but I was wrong! Glass is a very, very demanding, different medium to learn how to execute. I went to Turkey for a three-week workshop; I studied with Patty Gray; I studied at a studio near Seattle. In order for me to get to where I am now, I had to have help. I was not able to figure out the firing schedule. With glass, the bigger it is, the thicker it is, and the slower you have to go up and the slower you have to come down. There are many weeks sometimes of cooling process, or it goes into thermal shock and blows up."

She loves the metaphor of masks. "I've always done tribal themes in all of my art, whether painting or ceramics," Mears said. "I'm infatuated with the drama of where we came from. I've just enjoyed the development of the possibilities that theme offers. Also, my work is very textural, not polished and finished. There are very few artists that execute in glass the way I do. I love texture. I love the sculptural elements of it. Making it look like a blown glass piece? That just isn't me. The last kiln I bought, I thought probably I would never want to do larger pieces than are at Pippin. I love doing larger pieces. Glass has been so much fun for me; you can move it anywhere. It just offers so many more possibilities. I'm showing only glass with Pippin. I have a solo show Howell Gallery (in Oklahoma City) that will be both paintings and glass."

Nancy Reyner

Reyner, a Santa Fe artist, noted that the pieces she is showing at Pippin are not her current work. "They are early pieces from 10 years or so back, and represent different points in my journey," she said.

"A friend once said the background we paint represents our inner self and the forms we choose are more or less our projected persona. In the painting 'Cosmic Haze,' for instance — it is part of a whole series when I was thinking about a lot of things floating in space, tangible forms. I realized I was putting a lot of forms in the front and really hiding my inner self. My definition of painting is presenting a 3D space," Reyner said.

"I teach a lot, and talk about how to enter a piece; the viewing experience is very important to me. If we slow that viewing experience down, as Americans who read from left to right, we actually enter from the left. When I'm painting, I ask myself, 'What kind of experience is the viewer going to have?' The less static we have between ourselves as a human being and making that painting, the better ... there's a painting that's also available that is a big blue diamond with orange vibes. That's an interesting point where I started to get more into the inner self. I look back on this painting and I'm moving the table and vase. I'm actually pushing the forms off. I really want to be painting space.

"My current work is back to a different balance between space and forms," she said. "I read a lot of texts from Buddhism and meditate, and I realized all the forms look like they're dissolving in space and the space looks pregnant with form. It was interesting for me to look back on this early work and sort of study the journey I've been on."

Reyner grew up on East Coast, and worked with artists and public art after she was graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design and earned a master's in fine arts from Columbia University. She came to New Mexico about 26 years ago, when she married a man who had a gallery here. "We ran Gallery 10 ... always liked being in art-making and being in the public. I like a little of both." The marriage ended, but her painting did not.

Alan Soffer

Soffer, the man whose work as an abstract expressionist in encaustic, acrylics and oil has made his life "delicious," grew up in Philadelphia and lives outside Philadelphia now. He has lived there all his life, except for two years in Oklahoma in the Army. But he has traveled extensively, to India, Israel, Spain. "My favorite place on earth is Abiquiu, New Mexico, Ghost Ranch ...," he said.

Soffer will have a 40-year retrospective held at Villanova in a year and a half. He started in sculpture, but "took a class in abstract painting to help my sculpture, fell in love with it and never looked back."

In the early 1990s, he discovered encaustic. "I saw a painting at MOMA (the Museum of Modern Art in New York City) that had dimensions and a translucency I'd never seen," he recalled. "Very few people knew about encaustic then. It seemed to appeal to my two loves, sculpture and painting. I'd say 70 percent of my work is encaustic now," he said.

"In 2005, I organized a national conference on encaustic. We had discussions, mini-workshops and created a traveling exhibition that went to Arizona, California and Kennebunkport, Maine ... I think I helped push the genre a little further," Soffer said. "Now a lot of people are doing encaustics.

"I teach sometimes; I love teaching. My wife is a conceptual artist, and we do what we call 'art incubator' workshops. I have had a beautiful life, and I hope to keep doing it. I'm a visual person, not a verbal person. I don't hold onto dates or names. But I feel like I'm always snapping images and putting them in my brain — and then they turn up in my work."

If you go

WHAT: "What's This Journey About?" group show

WHEN: Today through Sept. 15; reception 5-8 p.m. today.

WHERE: Pippin Contemporary, 125 Lincoln Ave.

CONTACT: (505) 795-7476

COURTESY OF LEWALLEN GALLERIES

"Together Alone," an exhibition of work by contemporary glass sculptor Lucy Lyon, opens today at LewAllen Galleries at the Railyard. "Best Friends II" is a 2012 cast glass sculpture.

OPENING EXHIBITS

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820-3300.

MABEL DODGE LUHAN HOUSE, 240 Morada Lane, Taos. Taos Artist Organization Studio Tour featuring 41 artists from 5-8 p.m.; free. Through Sunday. Call 575-751-9686.

12. WINTEROWD FINE ART, 701 Canyon Road. "Alex Gabriel Bernstein: Natural History," new glass sculpture. Reception 5-7 p.m. Through Sept. 13. Call 992-8878.

13. EL ZAGUAN, 545 Canyon Road. "Family Secrets Redux," mixed-media and installation by Brenda Roper. Through Sept. 12. Reception 5-7 p.m. Call 982-0016.

14. ZANE BENNETT CONTEMPORARY ART, 535 S. Guadalupe St. "Mercado ... La Habana: Six Contemporary Cuban Artists." Reception ... p.m. Through Sept. 21. Call 982-8111.

SATURDAY

JOHNSONS OF MADRID GALLERIES OF FINE ART AND FIBER ART, 2843 N.M. 14, Madrid. Reception 3-5 p.m. in the gallery's seven rooms. 471-1054.

NIGHTLIFE

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um Hill Cafe, 710 Camino Lejo, 984-8900.

SALSA NIGHT WITH DJ LEO, 9 p.m., no cover. The Lodge at Santa Fe, 750 N. St. Francis Drive, 992-5800.

DJS QZEN AND GARGAMEL, 9 p.m., $5. Rouge Cat, 101 W. Marcy St., 983-6603.

TGIF ORGAN RECITAL with Arthur Wills, Thomas Tomkins and Paul Meister, 5:30-6 p.m., free. First Presbyterian Church, 208 Grant Ave., 982-8544.

THE LITTLEST BIRDS, Americana, 6 p.m., no cover. Second Street Brewery at the Railyard, 1607 Paseo de Peralta, 989-3278.

TOP 40 WITH MARC ANTHONY, 9 p.m., no cover. Cities of Gold, 10 Cities of Gold Road, 455-3313.

ZENOBIA, soul and R&B, 8 p.m., no cover. La Fiesta Lounge (La Fonda), 100 E. San Francisco St., 982-5511.

SATURDAY

CLASSICAL GUITAR, 6:30 p.m., no cover. The Bull Ring, 150 Washington Ave., 983-3328.

FREE RANGE RAMBLERS, bluegrass, 6 p.m., no cover. Second Street Brewery at the Railyard, 1607 Paseo de Peralta, 989-3278.

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*Prices may have changed, see restaurant for details