

in pursuit of expression: Yuhuei Pierce

by Rebecca Webb

Yuhuei Pierce prefers to let her artwork speak for itself. Her abstract oil paintings communicate on a visceral, poetic level. The compositions are dramatic, often in size, but also in the energy and expression of the brushstrokes. The paint on the canvas

ates important contrast.

While the large pieces require that you stand back to take in their full effect, they also reward close inspection. Standing next to the canvas, another layer of complexity emerges: oil paint laid on so thick and with such texture that it resembles islands of lava;

thought, and are like "one long breath."

Although Pierce has had artistic inclinations since childhood, she only began to paint professionally in 1997. She came to the United States from Taiwan in 1980 to pursue a graduate degree, and ended up earning masters degrees in sociology and library science and pursuing a Ph.D. in mathematical sociology. After a successful career in academia, library science, journalism, and foreign affairs, Pierce took up the paintbrush. She then studied at the Academy of Art in Singapore and privately with a teacher in London. An important part of her continued study "is the cultivating and sharpening" of her senses—both "trained and untrained." Beyond this, Pierce, who speaks thoughtfully and with a quiet ease, has difficulty pinpointing her influences. She is conscious of drawing from Eastern and



detail of 'Grounding in Space' by Yuhuei Pierce

splatters, smatters, pools, juts, arcs, curves, wisps, blurs. It's like free jazz in paint—freedom and improvisation grounded by thought and discipline. Her pieces feel feminine yet strong; elegant but earthy. They breathe.

In "Line," an exhibit of her work at Salmon Falls Village Gallery through Nov. 5, you can also see how Pierce, a Taiwanese born American, is influenced by her childhood practice of Chinese calligraphy, which she says is concerned with "energy, flow and proportion." The large canvases that Pierce often favors—making her paintings "more breathable" and "able to stretch out to the wall"—evoke the traditional long Chinese scrolls.

There are large works that are divided into three canvases, and her works are frequently unframed and sometimes even unstretched. Space is given its own space. Pierce says that while it's thought of as being blank, space is its own feature and cre-

a strong line of one color that bleeds and blurs into multiple colors—miniature worlds of drama. She notes that while people are often intrigued by brilliant color, a lack of color can bring out so much more of the color that is present. And, indeed, in many of her paintings, only a few colors are central.

Pierce paints the large canvases on the floor. It's a physical exercise—moving around the canvas, dripping paint, using a brush and a palette knife. In her work, the paint (including the making of it), the brushstrokes, the space, the line and the color are all important. Pierce doesn't "put in hours" or paint every day, she says. She only paints when she is ready; she waits until she has the feeling that she "can't wait to get back to the painting." Inspired by life, visits to museums, lectures, meditation and travel, which Pierce says "opens everything up," her pieces are derived from "deep thinking," following a train of conceptual

Western art, but thinks in terms of having her own style.

Her influences are broad; her approach intuitive. She paints alone, "assuming a monastic mindset," she says. It takes her anywhere from two weeks to two months to complete a painting. She doesn't regret her choices, and she "just knows" when a piece is finished. Because the expression of her inner world is unmistakably reflected in her art, it makes sense that Pierce chooses not to sign her paintings; the entire work is her signature.

Pierce does not consider herself

mainstream. Her work has shown in small galleries in the areas she has lived, including Haley Farm Gallery in Kittery. She has also had exhibitions in Asia, California and North Carolina. Although Pierce now lives primarily in North Carolina, she continues to maintain a studio in Rollinsford's Salmon Falls Mills.

In the airy, unpretentious Salmon Falls Village Gallery, Pierce's dynamic artwork is complemented by the beautifully wrought woodwork of furniture maker David Leach, who also has a studio in the nearby mill. Her "Grounding in Space Between Leavings" is inspired by one of Leach's chairs. A study in deep brown with sections of paint scraped to evoke wood grain, the piece is a testament to the artistic conversation between Pierce and Leach. This show, with Pierce's dynamic, provocative paintings that communicate so much, is a conversation well worth joining.



Line
featuring paintings by Yuhuei
Pierce and fine furniture by
David Leach

Salmon Falls Village Gallery
through Nov. 5
72 Front St., Rollinsford
603-740-0330



detail of 'Flower of Paradise' by Yuhuei Pierce