

Visiting the near and far 'Perspectives' of Linda Press

By Mike Giuliano 01/12/06

Artists offer a creative take on the world, but Linda Press goes further than most by actually visiting much of the world. Her aptly titled exhibit at Howard Community College, "Traveling Perspectives," includes oil paintings and watercolors set in France, Italy, New York City, Turkey, Russia, Arizona, Ireland, Washington, D.C., China and even Howard County.

In a compositional sense, the perspectives favored by this Howard Community College adjunct faculty member include high-elevation views of architecturally crowded cityscapes. She's at her best in such paintings as "St. Julian, Paris" and "Paris, from the Sorbonne," in which the densely packed buildings indicate a civilized old place in which your neighbors are in close proximity.

Significantly, there are no people depicted in her paintings. The human presence is suggested by the buildings people occupy.

Architectural styles help define a culture, and this artist has a penchant for assertive bits of color to emphasize a building's fancy trim.

Even the artist's rolling rural landscapes often incorporate elements of the built environment. The painting "Tuscany Patterns" is visually anchored by a very solid-looking urn atop a wall in the foreground. Although most of the pictorial space is devoted to an expansive view of an Italian pastoral landscape, the urn and wall serve as reminders that there is a long history of settlement here.

Her other landscape views of Tuscany and other places in the world often include buildings that fit into their bucolic environment as naturally as the trees.

The exhibit has its share of long views of city skylines and country fields, but it has just as many perspectives that amount to being architectural close-ups.

In the painting "Sergiev Posad," the center of attention is an onion-domed church whose distinctive shape encourages your imagination to extend beyond the tightly cropped image and fill in the details of a traditional society defined by the Russian Orthodox church.

Other paintings also feature architectural details that speak to the cultural attributes of societies around the globe. These include the fussy facade of a building in Lyon, France, which metaphorically resembles a woman making a fashion statement; and a high view from inside a building on Hudson Street in New York City that sees the surrounding neighborhood as framed by a fire escape, much as a resident might see it.

Press shows how ancient columns in Ephesus, Turkey, retain their eternal presence despite loose paint handling in the composition as a whole, and makes the highly decorated roofing of an old building in Xian, China, even more prominent through such bold color choices as placing green next to purple.

Most of the views captured in this show required a passport, but several kept the artist close to home. An acrylic painting of a rural Howard County scene and a similar watercolor are modestly scaled reminders that pockets of undeveloped land remain in this suburban county. Similarly, a painting of Lake Elkhorn in Columbia has such spontaneous brushwork that its quick strokes and melting colors seem like a first impression quickly immortalized on canvas.

These peaceful local scenes may lack obvious tourist appeal, but they're quietly appealing in their own way.

Linda Press exhibits through Feb. 10 at Howard Community College in Columbia.

