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## Ancient Voyages 11/26/03



**Tracey Adams' world combines earth tones with archetypal imagery.**

*By Rick Deragon*

**Photo: "Coracle with Aqueduct" is a good example of Tracey Adams' iconic style.**

Tracey Adams is one local artist who has arrived at that enviable place where her imagery, technique and emotional concerns merge into highly evocative works. She fuses abstraction with iconic forms that engage the viewer in manifold ways. Contemplation of her paintings means responding to the paint and lush surfaces as well as decoding the icons that assert themselves, in Adams' earthy style, as singular points of reference.

"I get my imagery from the environment, the things all

around me" says Adams, turning from one of her paintings to look out the second-story window of her studio where the trees of the Carmel Meadows district sway and embrace the fog creeping up the hill.

In one painting, a single barren tree rises monumentally in the center of the otherwise stark picture. Muted earth tones, mottled and dancing on the textured surface, serve as the ground for this tree, which the artist has drawn with a liquid brush that defines some branches clearly and solidly, and other times trails off as shadowy suggestions of limbs.

This tree, like the many other single trees she incorporates into her work, possesses trees' essential nature, stripped down to an archetypal form with no foliage to encumber the reading of its lean, willowy shape. It evokes bigger ideas: growth, seasons, life cycles, nature's zeal to perpetuate itself.

Adams may look to her immediate environment for images, but she also looks within herself for the treatment of that imagery. Things appear personal, carefully chosen, and considered. "I was an anthropology major in college before I pursued my love of art. I've always been fascinated by ancient cultures, the basic similarities between ancient cultures' lifestyles and ours," she says.

Adams completed a music program at the New England Conservatory of Music, studying piano and taking a Master's degree in conducting. While finishing that course of studies, Adams took nightly art classes at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, earning a Master's in Art from that institution as well. She then spent 12 years conducting in Los Angeles, including several positions with Early Music societies, squeezing in her drawing and painting work between those conducting gigs. Indeed, one can practically hear the contrapuntal strains of psalteries, harps, viols, recorders and sackbuts coursing around her paintings as a soundtrack.

"I'm a private person, and the process of working with people as in the music world did not, ultimately, sit well with me," observes Adams, "I'm more in tune working

alone."

Adams' journey to this point of stylistic confluence and mature expression ran its course, first, with tightly rendered drawings of fruits and vegetables. Layers upon layers of graphite cover these sheets as she examines every nuance of light and surface. The sheer labor of these drawings took its toll, and the artist sought solace in color field painting. This second adventure was devoid of expressionistic brushwork, but did include mottling and textural activity.

"I really love to draw things," says Adams, "so these color field works led to the inclusion of organic forms, the suggestion of things. I was trying to find some cohesive way to work in all of my interests."

Eventually, Adams achieved her goal as the references to ancient cultures, the carefully rendered icons, the organic and hard-edged abstraction and sumptuous textures came together in her current body of work.

The hallmark of her mature style is the use of evocative, iconic images that interact with the earthy color and texture. These icons reappear in her body of work like character actors called on to contribute their expertise: a tree, an egg shape, a ladder, a bowl.

An Adams painting is an organized rectangle or square divided into parts, grid-like, with her chosen icons inhabiting some sections, while abstract shapes or textures live in the others. A voluptuous pot, typical of a hundred global cultures, may be juxtaposed to the span of an arched bridge or aqueduct, a stylized boat image, a plant. Like charged electrical poles, the icons arouse the viewer's associations which then act as the electric current connecting them all. This current bounces from icon to icon, jumps along the pulsating geometric repetitions, and creates a subjective meaning that registers in the heart of intuition. One doesn't read the story as much as feel it.

In isolating her icons in this manner, Adams draws the viewer into a dialogue. Not only what is depicted must be considered, but how it is rendered, and why. Her

repertoire of icons links the viewer to ancient cultures. Giving substance to the connection is a wealth of techniques: the layers of paint and textured surfaces form an earthy ground into which icons are embedded; the glyph-like abstract marks suggest primitive writing, full of potency and lost meaning.

"I'm not a trendy artist, I'm not an edgy artist. Some like what I do, some don't," Adams observes. "The people who respond to the work, I think, want to have some sense of place in the world, something spiritual, if you will, a special connection to the past, some order, structure, a peacefulness."

**ARt by tracey adams can be found at the winfield Gallery in Carmel. 624-3369.**

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