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Detroit Art Review

Art is the outward expression of an inner life of an artist that is vast and varied.

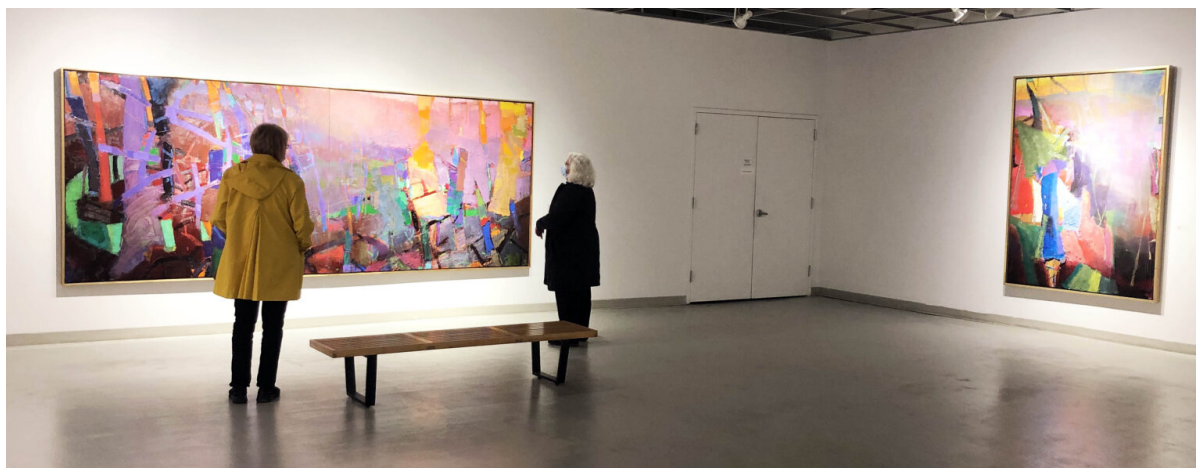
Brian Rutenberg and Frank Fisher @ BBAC

April 3, 2021 by Ron Scott

Brian Rutenberg, painter, and Frank James Fisher, ceramicist, open the Spring Season of 2021 at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center

As Michiganders crawl out of the winter and the Covid-19 pandemic (be it as slow as it is), we are greeted by the BBAC exhibitions that make it worth our time for a visit. The main gallery features the ceramic work by Frank Fisher and Brian Rutenberg's abstractions in the Robinson Gallery. "This is a must-see, exceptional exhibit," said Annie VanGelderren, BBAC president and CEO. "Truly, all of our spring exhibiting artists are particularly wonderful in their own mediums. Visitors will certainly leave inspired."

Sitting in the Robinson Gallery for a lengthy amount of time, I begin to acclimate to these large oil paintings by the nationally known artist from South Carolina, Brian Rutenberg. The imagery gradually falls into place, something I would describe as abstract landscapes where there is an abundance of woodlands, horizons, skies, streams and rivers. Although he has spent his adult life, post-graduate school, in New York City, these compositions are unique, inspired by the coastal Carolina landscape of his youth. Those formative years must have made its mark on Rutenberg's sensibility in terms of subject matter, as he brings this vibrant color



Brian Rutenberg, Installation, 3.2021 All images courtesy of DAR

scheme and the issue of scale to the forefront of the work. If these paintings were all 20 x 30 inches, we would not be so affected. Still, *Green River* is a portal into the richness of heavily applied oil paint in a variety of ways and a color scheme that uses primary and secondary colors in a form that is individual to each painting. There is a newness in how Rutenberg handles his forms, something that separates him from other abstract landscape painters, leaving us with a unique experience.



Brian Rutenberg, GreenRiver, Oil on Linen, 63x160"



Brian Rutenberg, Detail *Green River*

Here is a detail from *Green River* (18 x 20 inches), where we see Rutenberg using a large variety of tools to spread paint: brushes, sticks, pallet knives and trowels. There is a color selection which repeats throughout the work that reflects on the subjects, a stream or vertical branch, and skies that reach out into a variety of pastel hues.

The large 60 x 82 inch oil painting, *Corsair*, is another example of an abstract landscape where there is a horizon running horizontally with vertical lines like tree branches on the left and a blue stream on the right. The foreground dominates the composition with organic brown and foliage green. The landscape may be subliminal, but it is clear to this viewer that Rutenberg's abstract expressionism consistently repeats itself throughout the work. The Myrtle Beach-born painter is obsessed with the physicality of low hanging trees along South Carolina's waterways, and continued to draw on those years long after moving to New York City. When I refer to the term abstract expressionism, it would be similar to the female paintings by Willem de Kooning, where the figure is abstracted. Rutenberg does this in a unique way with his abstract landscapes.



Brian Rutenberg earned his undergraduate degree from the College of Charleston and his Masters of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York City.