

A World Within: 'Emerging Images' By Shirley Nisbet

By ANNIE DEAN

The paintings of Shirley Mossman Nisbet have transformed the gallery at the Cotuit Center for the Arts into a room of transcendent calmness, beauty, and light. As the center's executive director David Kuehn observed, "When people walk in the gallery to visit the show, they change. There is an immediate sense of calm. There is so much beauty and serenity that the room transforms people while they are here."

Ms. Nisbet of North Falmouth has been an artist for over 70 years and has committed her life to contemplating the natural world and translating it onto paper and canvas. She began using watercolors at the age of 5 when she was bed-ridden with polio.

"I loved painting immediately," she explained. "It was more than just a way to pass the time. I was always dreaming as a child and I have never stopped contemplating the world. I find richness and depth in my art from all my memories and experiences."

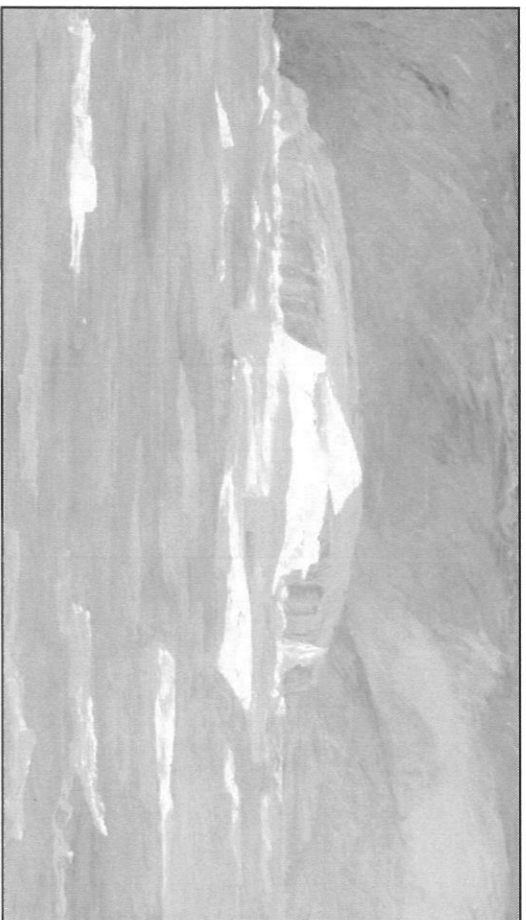
This depth of vision and expression is certainly evident in her current solo show, "Emerging Images," at the Cotuit Center for the Arts. Each painting in this series evokes a sense of place, a landscape of mist, fog or ice, sea and earth. The soft colors beckon the viewer to succumb to the mood and tone of the paintings.

Although mostly abstract and of differing dimensions, each painting has a visible horizon line that grounds it on the canvas. The paintings have been so carefully placed and hung that all the horizon lines appear on the same plane. Together, the paintings become atmospheric, seemingly floating in space. This effect transforms the whole gallery into a still, soothing, and meditative environment.

Ms. Nisbet herself was surprised at the effect: "It is the first time I have seen these large pieces all together in one space. It is amazing—very rewarding."

Completed within the last 15 years, these artworks, some as large as nine feet, represent a particular stylistic period in her artistic life, she says. "I purposely don't date the works. It's irrelevant," she said, "because they are from the same artistic period, and that is what really matters."

Although composed of a wide



"Melting Glacier" by Shirley Mossman Nisbet.



"Everchanging Light" by Shirley Mossman Nisbet.

range of colors, some soft white, some in grays and rose, and others bold mixtures of blues and reds, they all have similar compositional elements. There is a central area of light that draws the eye deep into the picture plane. Intriguing bold strokes, paint drips, or textures then allow one's eye to travel back to the surface.

One painting in the show, "Polaris Blue," which Ms. Nisbet completed nearly 25 years ago, is the one she feels may have been the genesis of all the others. She identifies the long horizontal orientation, the dark area on the right-hand corner, the heavy energetic element left of center, and the luminous middle area as seminal to the work that followed.

"There is both movement, but calm at the same time; that gives it a very dramatic quality," she said. Although her works are inspired by lifelong journeys throughout the world—to Ireland, Chile, and Alaska, for example—none of them are literal depictions.

"I start the painting with vague ideas," she explained, "but they always come from memories in my head that are evocative of my experiences."

A Cape resident for almost 20 years, she was inspired by her long winter walks on Old Silver Beach for some of the paintings. "I love the cool colors and the sea during that time of year. And I love the fog, it is so calming."

Asked if she has a personal favorite in the show, Ms. Nisbet declined to choose. She did mention that "Melting Glacier," a work inspired by an Alaskan trip, continues to fascinate her. "The cold ice, melting, peeling off and floating away made me feel very aware of our changing environment," she said.

Another appealing and less abstract landscape, "The Glacier," was inspired by a vista she observed on one of her travels off the coast of Chile. It is very large, 108 inches long, and Ms. Nisbet worked on it for over two years. "The light was always different, ever-changing, and I was fascinated by that."

The effect of light, its impressionistic and transient qualities, and how it transforms and modifies the visual nature of the landscape, is a significant theme in Ms. Nisbet's art. This is evidenced in another nine-foot-long painting, aptly titled "Everchanging Light."

With such a powerful body of work on display, it was a surprise to hear Ms. Nisbet explain that these horizontal pictures now represent the end of a lengthy period of artistic focus.

"It is time to change out of the horizontal," she said, as she considers the new direction her art will take. Some indications of her experimentation are evidenced in smaller works exhibited separately in the Cotuit show. In these works, Ms. Nisbet uses encasitic a

wax medium that allows the artist creative variety: it can be embedded with pigment, cast, carved, scribed into, layered and polished. The works have a more sculptural surface and some include luminous cent metallic paint that shifts the visual field when viewed from different angles.

Last year she spent four weeks at an artists' retreat in Virginia working on smaller and more intimate pictures and experimenting with different materials. She is expanding her use of metallic paint, and is incorporating red Virginia earth to create vibrant colors and textures. Art lovers on Cape Cod will have an opportunity to see these recent experiments in another solo show of her work that will be at the Cotuit Arts Center from July 7 to 17, with an opening reception on Sunday, July 10, from 3 to 5 PM.

When asked how she thinks her new paintings will ultimately look, she artfully replied, "I really don't know which of the many directions I will go—but I might after I see the show!"

Ms. Nisbet has a comprehensive website where the full range of her paintings may also be viewed: www.shirleynisbet.com.

"Emerging Images" will be on display at the Cotuit Center for the Arts through June 27. The art center is at 4404 Route 28 in Cotuit and is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 AM to 4 PM and during performances. Admission is free. For more information, call 508-428-0689 or visit www.ArtsOnTheCape.com.

Ms. Dean, an artist, art educator and historian, is a lifelong resident of Falmouth.

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Viewing Guide
www.fctv.org
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Friday, June 17, 2011

6:00 AM Chemical Spraying: A Silent Killer

7:00 AM Board of Selectmen 6/13/2011

10:30 AM Hurricane Hunter Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS, National Cemetery

12:30 PM People for Cats: This Old Cat House

2:00 PM A Little Light Music IV

3:31 PM Mass Gallery June 2011

4:00 PM Poka Time with Sus & Annie

5:30 PM The Village Green

6:16 PM Retiring in Falmouth - Exercise Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS National Cemetery

6:54 PM Arts Week

7:00 PM Behind the Badge

7:34 PM People Helping People

8:31 PM Death and Dessert: Crime 9:22 PM PCTV: 2010 In Review

10:00 PM Police Memorial Day 2011

10:30 PM Stangle for America's Soul

11:30 PM Chillin' Man

11:58 PM Fanspire: Eastern Part One

Saturday, June 18, 2011

8:00 AM Conservation Commission

11:00 AM People for Cats

12:30 PM Zoning Board of Appeals

3:30 PM Mass Gallery June 2011

4:00 PM Poka Memorial Day 2011

4:30 PM The Village Green

5:00 PM Memorial Flag Ceremony

5:57 PM Death and Dessert

6:54 PM Arts Week

7:00 PM Morning Glory Farm

8:00 PM What People Think: Scottish Exchange

9:00 PM A Little Light Music IV

10:31 PM Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS, National Cemetery

11:48 PM Stangle for America's Soul

11:54 PM Hurricane Hunter

Sunday, June 19, 2011

8:00 AM A Little Light Music IV

9:31 AM Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS, National Cemetery

10:08 AM Police Memorial Day 2011

10:36 AM Hurricane Hunter

12:30 PM The Village Green

1:30 PM Bath Shino Presents

2:00 PM Culture Chapel Workshop

3:00 PM Faith and Deliverance Ministry

4:30 PM Serpines from America

5:00 PM SHL: Lessee Strips

6:54 PM Arts Week

7:00 PM What People Think: Scottish Exchange

8:30 PM The Village Green

8:30 PM The Village Green

8:30 PM Morning Glory Farm

9:30 PM Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS, National Cemetery

10:06 PM A Little Light Music IV

11:38 PM Schindler's List Revisited

Monday, June 20, 2011

8:00 AM Assembly of Delegates

9:30 AM What People Think: Scottish

10:30 AM Village Green June 2011

11:30 AM Chemical Spraying: A Silent Killer

12:30 PM LEPC 5-26-11

1:30 PM Morning Glory Farm

3:30 PM Memorial Day 2011

4:00 PM VNA Health Highlights

4:00 PM Falmouth First

5:00 PM Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS

6:15 PM Mass Gallery June 2011

6:30 PM The Village Green

7:00 PM Board of Selectmen 6/20/2011

10:00 PM Death and Dessert: Crime

Authors

Tuesday, June 21, 2011

8:00 AM New Parents Can Use

9:00 AM People Helping People

9:58 AM Behind the Badge

10:31 AM Mass Gallery June 2011

11:00 AM Village Green June 2011

12:30 PM A Little Light Music IV

2:30 PM Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS

3:30 PM Chemical Spraying: A Silent Killer

4:00 PM Morning Glory Farm

4:00 PM Memorial Day 2011

6:00 PM Village Green June 2011

6:54 PM Arts Week

7:00 PM Conservation Commission Meeting

10:00 PM What People Think: Scottish

11:00 PM Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS

Wednesday, June 22, 2011

8:00 AM Assembly of Delegates

9:30 AM People for Cats: This Old Cat House

10:30 AM What People Think: Scottish

12:30 PM Hurricane Hunter

2:00 PM Board of Selectmen 6/20/2011

3:00 PM Memorial Day 2011

6:00 PM LEPC 5-26-11

6:54 PM Arts Week

7:00 PM Conservation Commission Meeting

10:00 PM What People Think: Scottish

11:00 PM Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS

Thursday, June 23, 2011

8:00 AM Falmouth Planning Board

10:30 AM Morning Glory Farm

12:30 PM Death and Dessert: Crime

2:30 PM What People Think: Scottish

3:00 PM Join the Voices of Recovery

4:00 PM Cape Cod Family Alliance

4:00 PM Arroyo Newspaper

4:30 PM Today's Air Force

5:00 PM Retiring in Falmouth - Exercise

6:00 PM Village Green June 2011

6:30 PM Zoning Board of Appeals

6:30 PM A Little Light Music IV

11:30 PM Penny Dreadful's Snickers

Friday, June 24, 2011

6:00 AM Chemical Spraying: A Silent Killer

7:00 AM Board of Selectmen 6/20/2011

10:30 AM Morning Glory Farm

12:30 PM A Little Light Music IV

2:01 PM Memorial Day 2011

2:00 PM Memorial Flag Ceremony at OHS

4:00 PM Poka Time with Sus & Annie

5:00 PM Village Green June 2011

5:30 PM Retiring in Falmouth - Exercise

6:15 PM People for Cats: This Old Cat House

6:54 PM Arts Week

7:00 PM Behind the Badge

7:34 PM People Helping People

8:31 PM What People Think: Scottish

Birds In The Hall

Maryalice Eitzenberg of Chatham, oil and pastel painter Rosaline Nadeau of Orleans, and pen-and-ink artist Carol Livingston of West Yarmouth.

From off-Cape are pencil artist Deborah Friedman of Wellesley, muralist and scientific illustrator Amy Bartlett Wright of Rhode Island, and photographer Paul Hersey of Bennington, Vermont.

Much of the artwork in the show will be available for sale, with a portion of the proceeds to benefit Highfield Hall.

For those who want to try their hand at drawing birds or other fauna and flora, Ms. Child will lead a two-hour introductory workshop to nature sketching on Thursday, July 7, beginning at 10:30 AM. The fee is \$15 and includes all materials. Preregistration is required, either at www.highfieldhall.org or by calling 508-495-1878, extension 308.

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