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Alfa Art Gallery exhibit bursting with color

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Correspondent

Being surrounded by the lush vibrancy of John Hawaka's large lacquer abstractions imparts an exalting effect. The orchestrations of flowing, lucid colors across canvas after canvas enchants the eye and raises the spirits.

Visitors to the Alfa Art Gallery in New Brunswick can enjoy Hawaka's "Infusions of Color" in a solo show running through Aug. 7. A rare practitioner of the painstaking lacquer painting process, Hawaka has won countless awards and was commissioned to create a 140-foot wall design for JFK Medical Center in Edison.

Lacquer painting originated in China more than a millennium ago, and is a meticulous, time-consuming technique. Completing a painting may take months, and involves the application of multiple layers of color and frequent polishing and rubbing. But the resulting richness of hue and spectral glow justify the efforts.

"I like the end result," says Hawaka. "The medium has a mind of its own, and I am happy when it agrees with me."

The North Brunswick artist began painting in acrylics, but eventually became dissatisfied with the medium. One evening he took a particularly frustrating painting outside and hosed it down, then went to bed. The next morning he found that the watered-down canvas had achieved astonishing effects. He began experimenting in search of a more suitable technique and finally found it in the ancient lacquer tradition.

Music plays an important part in Hawaka's work. He likes listening to jazz and classical while painting, especially the work of composers Sibelius, Shostakovich and Beethoven. The musical rhythm and harmony correlate with the flow of his improvisations.

"When I start a painting, I have no particular idea in mind," Hawaka says. "I apply a color and go from there. I have no subject — it's a matter of color and design: sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. It's not like building a house. I have no floor plans — just a gut feeling."

Hawaka prefers creating sprawling, sensuous canvases that fill the eye. He dreams of completing a two-story painting on a wall of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

"For some reason, I like to paint large," says Hawaka. "I prefer to paint vertically rather than horizontally. I feel that my vertical paintings have more to say."

Additional Facts

INFUSIONS OF COLOR
lacquer paintings
by John Hawaka
Through Aug. 7
Alfa Art Gallery

108 Church St.,
New Brunswick
Free
(732) 296-6720
www.alfaart.org
