

ENTERTAINMENT

VISUAL ARTS

Mystic crystal revelations: Painting the age of Aquarius

By Kathy Brainard Cook
Staff correspondent

Feel like getting away from it all? Has the daily grind of the job, the weather, the traffic, the kids and the bills got you down? Does some quiet time in a softly lit room, surrounded by tranquil colors and peaceful music, appeal to you?

Then you should visit 123 Arts and escape into the timeless world of French-Canadian artist Jean-Jacques Giguere.

Unlike many of the Expressionist works at recent exhibitions in town, Giguere's paintings are purposefully passive and calm. Where the Expressionist artist hopes to reach out and touch the viewer, creating emotional reactions he opposite. Instead of reaching out, his paintings invite you in, allowing you to lose yourself in their geometric world of warm yellows, quiet greens and soothing blues.

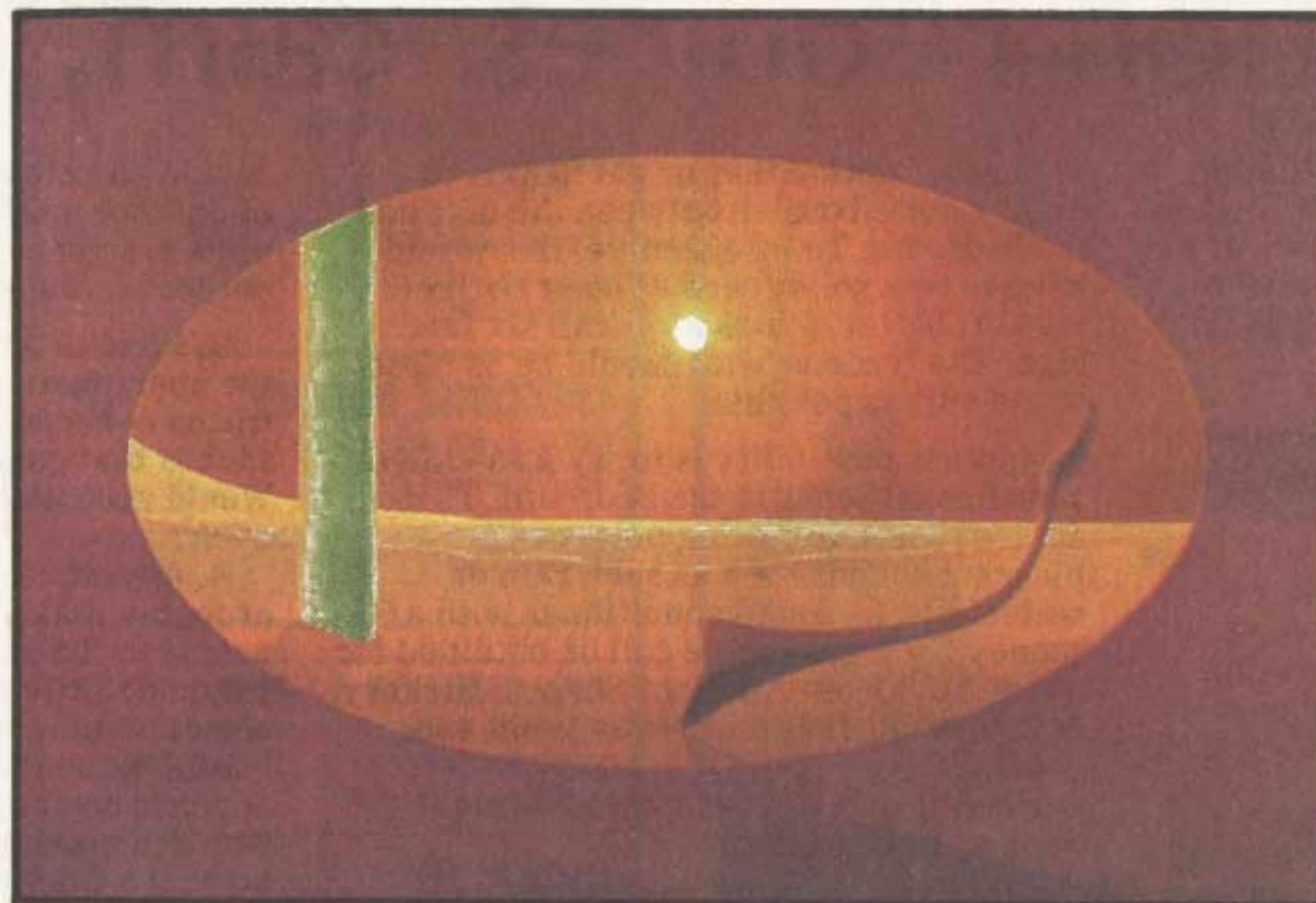
"The aim of my work," Giguere says, "is to establish a perfect balance between light, form and

color, with all colors used at maximum intensity. I believe that such a balance creates a space capable of eliminating time, and in so doing, allows the viewer/participant to leave behind physical preoccupations."

A native of Quebec, Giguere now makes his home in Cranbrook, British Columbia. He received his B.A. and M.A. in painting and printmaking from California State University at Sacramento in 1972 and 1973, respectively. He also received an M.F.A. from the University of the Americas in Cholula, Mexico, in 1974.

He has had several solo exhibitions in Quebec and Mexico. Since moving to the Pacific Northwest in 1984, he has exhibited in Oregon, Vancouver and now in Spokane.

His Spokane show deals with a topic that has been receiving increased attention in the '80s: the psychological power of various colors. Parents paint the baby's room black and white to stimulate learning, teachers use blue paper to calm hyperactive students, and executives wear "power colors" to



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build self-confidence. Giguere is a great believer in the psychological properties of color and incorporates these ideas in his work.

Titled "Meditation Through

Color," Giguere's exhibition at the 123 Art gallery space, located at S123 Madison, includes works in oil, dry pastels, acrylic, and lead and color pencil. To experience it in the manner intended by the artists, he

suggests that you visit the exhibition at least two or three times.

"It takes awhile for time to disappear," he explains with a smile.

The exhibition is set up in two rooms, the first of which is designed to prepare the viewer for the second, inner room. In the center of the first room, a small wooden sculpture provides the key to Giguere's unique color system of progressive harmonies. On a gray floor, surrounded by three purple walls, small columns, each a color of the rainbow, march in a circle. The size and shape of the columns vary with the intensity of each color. Brilliant yellow is a tiny sphere on top of a pin; orange is a small pyramid; the tallest column is deep blue.

In the inner room, the lights are softer. The feeling of being drawn into each painting is heightened by Giguere's use of a frame-within-a-frame, with the darker grays, blues and purples on the outside, leading toward the

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brighter colors in the inner circle of the picture. In the painting, which is number eight at this exhibition (it is actually No. 107 in Giguere's complete body of work), a dark blue rectangle forms the outer framework. Within it lies a dark red frame, and within that, an oval outline reveals a landscape that borders on surrealism. A yellow sun, a green column, and a red, tail-like object create a perfect balance within the space.

In painting No. 6, Giguere employs a clever technique in which he adds small insets at the left and right sides of the painting to reveal what the scene would look like if it continued beyond the work's edges. At the right of the painting, two poles lean against the side of a curving wall. A "window" inset in the wall reveals, in miniature, that the poles are leaning against a large column.

Another interesting thing that is happening in No. 6 is the apparent upward propulsion of a yellow oval. Most of it has already gone past the top of the painting, so we see only the bottom portion. This implied continuity beyond the borders of the canvas is an important unifying element in all of Giguere's work. If it were possible to put his entire body of work into one room, the viewer would be treated to approximately 708 feet of continuous, related art that Giguere calls a "visual diary of connecting pieces."

Giguere has actually codified his diary into "chapters," with each chapter containing work done in certain colors and using certain media. The works on display at 123 Arts represent several of Giguere's chapters, including four, five, nine, 10, 16 and 17, with chapter 17 being his most recently completed work.

The largest piece on display, No. 10, is a 20-foot mural from Chapter 17 that perhaps best illustrates the main themes of this complex artist's work.

In this mural, done in dry pastels, Giguere is most successful at creating the timeless, continuous dimensions he is seeking. Designed for a corporate board room, the waving lines, forms and colors create a feeling of space and freedom that should be ideal for brainstorming and problem-solving. The effect Giguere achieves through his balance of color and line is one of purposeful nothingness: Don't struggle to give meaning to the picture; instead, let the picture free you to drift and dream of whatever you choose.

Giguere describes the work he has done in Chapter 17 as follows: "One color harmony. The recapitulation of many ideas put together, and stronger use of the Aquarius symbol."

According to Giguere, the unifying theme throughout his visual diary is, in both form and content, the Aquarius symbol (which looks like a basic sine wave). By using it horizontally and vertically, he creates spheres, combinations of which in simple designs of waving lines and spheres provide the main dimensions for his work. Often the curve of the wave in one picture will pick up in the next.

For Giguere, however, the Aquarius symbol is more than an appealing wavy line. As the musical "Hair" told us, this is the "dawning of the age of Aquarius," the 2,000-year cycle of history that runs from 2,000 to 4,000 A.D. Giguere sees the Aquarian age as a time of enlightenment and peace, the time when "the mind will take over the body."

This type of mystic idealism that burned brightly in the '60s is still alive in Giguere's eyes, and it is the inspiration for his work. He believes that "a society surrounded by well-organized forms, colors and sounds could easily achieve high levels of consciousness."

"I'm a Utopian," he says. "I believe that it is possible to create something perfect somewhere, and I'd like to go there."

"I lived in almost total solitude for eight years to purify myself, to get away from all of the judging and being evil," he continued. "I'm not perfect, but I can differentiate between evil and beauty, and I'm for beauty."

"Meditation Through Color" by Jean-Jacques Giguere is on display at 123 Arts, located at S123 Madison, through June 28. Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. For more information, call 624-ARTS.