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Paintings explore fabric of life

By Candice Russell | Special Correspondent
December 29, 2007

Fooling the eye is part of the fun in looking at the paintings of Lainard Bush, the featured artist at the Ellen Charapko Gallery in Wilton Manors through Jan. 6.

On first glance, the works appear to be intricate collages of paper bits meticulously cut and pasted together in squares resembling the innards of a computer. Closer examination hints that the paintings may be made from scraps of braided fabric. Neither conclusion is accurate. Bush, who lives on a farm in Spring Creek, Pa., spends his cold winter months painting the surface of these canvases to an obsessive degree.

The patterns of lines aren't random but thoughtfully executed.

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"Everybody wants to know how I do it," says Bush, 56. "The paintings are built-up layers of paint and washes of color on a bare canvas. I start with a simple grid in pencil. Using the grid as a guideline, I add masking tape, then paint rapidly over the entire surface. I remove the tape, look at what I've done and repeat the process."

In a sense, however, the paintings are a little out of his control.

"When I paint, I don't usually have a conscious idea of what will come," Bush says. "It truly does come from within...."

"A designer once told me I should translate the paintings into fabric because he thought my paintings were the fabric of life. They are an effort to express the infinite complexity and depth of life. Within each painting, there are other paintings. Each could be one on its own. I paint to the edges, which extend infinitely in all directions like a universe in itself."

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Living in a remote corner of northwest Pennsylvania allows Bush time to concentrate on art. "I'm in the middle of nowhere by myself on a large old working farm, a lot of which is forested," says the artist.

"There's a lot of peace and quiet. I'm really able to focus on work there. I am very influenced by nature in an abstract or symbolic sense, yet my work tends to be very urban. The forms and colors in nature are the most direct influence on me."

This Ohio native attended Kent State and the San Francisco Art Institute, where he earned a master of fine arts degree. "My focus was on film as an art form," Bush says. "I didn't start seriously painting until 20 years ago."

Now his paintings function as Rorschach tests for those who delight in them. This writer saw butterflies in *Wild Flower Field*, an acrylic collage with shapes added on the canvas. It's the only collage in the show.

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"One of my best friends is a botanist and he told me that the forms in the painting are loosely based on orchid forms. When you put all these shapes together, you create this field and you can pull out what you want. I see all these totem animals in the paintings, which is great."

For more information, go online to ellencharapkogallery.com or call 954-547-9014.

Candice Russell is a freelance writer in Plantation.

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