

Rita Blitt: The Passionate Gesture



I owe it to myself to become the best artist that I can be, remembering always to put family first.

RITA BLITT, 1958

Rita Blitt: The Passionate Gesture is a comprehensive retrospective featuring a selection of paintings and sculptures spanning sixty-five years from 1941 to 2006. Rita Blitt's prolific body of work represents a lifelong journey from her early realistic paintings to her later gestural, abstract expressionistic style. Taking innovative risks with courage and conviction, she utilizes a wide variety of media including paint, pastel, acrylic, metal, wood, found object, text, sound and film. Each experiment with a new medium represents a step in the evolution of her personal style. While communicating passion and vitality through rhythm and movement, she captures the natural state of her composition with a certain elegance that accentuates both its simplicity and complexity. Emerging from every stroke, an intermingled combination of universal ideals is revealed through three consistent themes: Music, Nature and Concern for Humanity.

Throughout her artistic career, Blitt's work has portrayed an undulating balance of movement through life. Whether responding to music playing in her studio or simply hearing tones emerging from within her soul, Blitt always conveys a deep sense of rhythm in her work. Early paintings signal her love of music and dance as a forerunner for her recent accomplishments with internationally recognized musicians, dancers and composers in works

such as the award winning film *Caught in Paint* (2003), a collaboration with the Parsons Dance Company. The early works signifying rhythms include realistic paintings such as *Hallelujah* (1942), and *I've Got Rhythm* (1950). Later, music was suggested in nonfigurative sculpture such as *Buddy's Beat* (1972) where delightful acrylic dots dance on a sheet of acrylic with cut edges heated and shaped to suggest piano keys pulsating or the beat of drums. In the '80s, she created interactive Blitt sculptures which play music as a person approaches the work.

As her style matured, she came to realize that her subconscious act of drawing doodles surfaced from the most honest part of her soul and as such, soon translated into intensely powerful drawings and sculpture. From that day forward, her dancing hands have continuously created spontaneous lines. In 1977 Blitt experienced a life-changing approach to her work when she began drawing lines with both hands simultaneously. This momentous revelation made her feel as though she was dancing on paper. Her *Ovals* (1980–1984), which began as deeply felt lines drawn with two hands, developed into compositions with illuminated synergistic spectrums of color culminating in a holistic moment. *Seeking Truth* (1989) predated the meditative, yet energetic, Chi paintings of the '90s.

Adding a coda to her influences, nature, in its purest

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form is a significant presence in her work. Her early landscapes and outdoor scenes recorded the environmental beauty she experienced. Eventually, natural elements such as leaves, rocks and trees personified human beings and emotional responses. A yellow dab of paint (which mysteriously reappeared in her work through the years) was recently identified as the sun when her early note card, *Birthday Card for Mom* (1941) was discovered. This splash of yellow, taking the shape of a yellow ball, appeared in her key public sculpture titled *Lunarblitt* (1975), a monumental work depicting time and space. Because of its significance to the artist, it was recreated in a smaller size (2006).

An energetic pulse is a perpetual characteristic of her work, first caught as the forceful current of crashing waves depicted in the seascape *Bermuda* (1958), then abstracted and soared into *Seagulls and Ocean II* (1964), responding to light and space as depicted in *Splash of Light* (1976), while returning as a powerful surge in *Iceland Surge* (1993) and *Silent Energy* (1995). Nourished by the annual summer music festival, she created most of her large paintings in Aspen, Colorado, where her passion for music and nature was expressed in *Dancing Waters II* (2001) and *Aspen Dance I* (2004).

Moreover, Blitt's unique approach to syncopated rhythms reflected ubiquitous counterpoints—yin versus yang. Whether it was the optimistic feelings of joy from love and relationships (*Joyous Moment*, 1995), or frustrated sorrows of pain from inequity and strife (*Inner Torment*, 1989), both of these elements required each other for completeness. From the time she was a child, Blitt was sensitive to the mistreatment of others, as evidenced by her early paintings *Ridicule* (1947) and *Take Care of Him—He Bites!* (1947). Furthermore, these social observations and political reactions manifested in paintings of age

(*Those Years Have Come*, 1964) and war (*I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, 1966, and *In Fear of War I*, 1990), as well as in new sculptural endeavors inspired by an American flag flying in the wind, portrayed in her *Flag Series* (1966). In *Orblitt III* (1969), Blitt developed a unique process where she heated and encouraged a natural tear in acrylic sheet; thereby, resulting in a beautiful jagged edge symbolizing life's sharp contrasts. Most importantly, the love of her family, including her husband, Irwin (*Irwin and I*, 1962), daughter, Connie (*Connie Swinging*, 1965) and granddaughter Dorianna (*Celebrating Dorianna*, 1996-97) always remained at the forefront of her inspiration.

Blitt has continued to impart the timeless significance of music, nature and concern for humanity through her artwork and multi-media projects. From expressing the slightest gesture into a 60-foot monumental sculpture (*One*, 1984) her riveting work has impacted public spaces, museums and galleries both nationally and abroad. Working with dance companies, students and composers worldwide, she harmoniously transcends artistic disciplines. Her everlasting concern for the welfare of others prompted a successful international school program, using her words and poster *Kindness is Contagious, Catch it!* (1986). Her love of people and family have motivated interactive art, books and films in efforts to share a wonderful artistic experience, thereby making it accessible to all. Rita Blitt's unparalleled dynamic energy, freedom and use of form and space evoke the essence of truth and emotion, and continue to inspire viewers to interact, create and above all, appreciate the joy of life.

—Erin H. Friedberg, *Curator*

Exhibition curator Erin Friedberg is President of Art-in-Sight, Inc., an arts services firm which exists to provide artistic enrichment to public and private spaces. Ms. Friedberg is also the Visual Arts Coordinator for the City of Gainesville, FL where she is the Director of the Thomas Center Galleries and manages Gainesville's Art in Public Places Trust.