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Weekend

Plumbing the depths:

Works mix realism and abstraction

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Even in an era of art-making – when artists mix media with easy nonchalance, or combine styles to create hybrid "isms" that permeate their bodies of work – it's fairly unusual to see an artist plunge fully and successfully into two divergent ways of workmg.

And what could be more divergent than "objective" and "nonobjective?"

Lula Mae Blocton has managed to plumb the depths of both realism and abstraction, simultaneously, into equally strong bodies of work hung side by side in "Drawings on Life," at Quinebaug Valley Community College In Danielson

"I've always been an abstract artist, and I always felt you had to be one or the other," Blocton says. Now, though, she believes "I'm too old to have that kind of posi-



'Lula's Pudding Hill,' by Lula Mae Blocton

tion in how I see the world"

The current chairman of Eastern Connecticut State University's finearts department. Blocton has taught for nearly three decades – a career whose demands actually led her toward colored pencil, her current medium of choice.

"Teaching in general takes a lot of time" she obstmed. About seven years ago she decided to experiment with colored pencil in an effort to balance her own creative drive with her curriculum, administrative and planning duties.

"I found out I could mix (colored pencils) like paint, which is great," she said. "You can literally effect a change of colors by the choice of the colors you put over each other. That was really exciting. And you could start a drawing and leave, working on it in intervals."

Pencils were a major improvement over her favored medium, oil paint, which can't be reworked once it dries. "Colored pencils have given me a real sense of satisfaction; I can make colors

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Mixing realism and abstraction on canvas



'Limit 50'

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That intensity, though, comes from many layers of pencil strokes — sometimes 40 to 50,

Blocton's first venture into the self-portrait genre dates from

about the time she started using colored pencil. The pieces she shows in Danielson picture her looking directly at the viewer, exhibiting a variety of moods, in a variety of settings that seem to tell a story about some facet of her personality. "Ribbon Self Portrait" is exuberant, with purple sunset colors, a gleeful smile and shear ribbons twined around her. "Giza Self Portrait" depicts the Great Pyramid and the Sphinx in the background, shading the serenely smiling artist. "Awareness Lula" wears an AIDS T-shirt and seems to be clutching what might be a tool handle or a walking stick. We see the artist

behind the wheel of her car, in front of her house, seated by her computer. The viewer comes away with the feeling of having been introduced to, and shaken bands with, the artist.

Blocton said she recognizes the irony of depicting herself 'with all my material possessions. As a person growing up in the '60s, that was a real no-no.' "But it's meant to be a lot of fun. I'm saying to myself, it's OK to laugh." She added that the range of emotions, like the range of patterns and textures on her clothing in the portraits, was a deliberate part of her work

Patterns on cloth served as the

major focus of her abstract series in the show, too. In these works, Blocton arranged triangles cut from various colors of paper on her work surface, creating subtle variations in the stripes of color layers she applied in colored pencils. The finished effect evokes collage and patchwork simultaneously, and speaks clearly of their inspiration: African textiles.

"It's surprising to me what happens to a color ... (when it's) put on a different color of paper," she said, "I want a general feeling'- sometimes evoking a season - "but I don't really know sometimes what colors will follow other colors. I will generally stick only to the colors of the rainbow."

The layers of colors in all Blocton's drawings resemble the use of pastels, on a far finer scale than those blocks of colored chalks can supply. The abstracts employ, along with the bands of color, motifs that range from geometric (as in "Luta's Kente #1 ") to organic shapes reminiscent of seed pods or concentric rings.

Blocton taught art at the college level. at ECSU since 1988. Her work has been widely shown and included in publications. She's planning a retrospective next year at Middlesex Community College in Middletown. The show will continue through Oct. 5. Hours are Monday through Friday, 8:30 a. m. to 9 pm., Saturday 8:30 a.m. through 3 p.m.