

Raffaele D'Onofrio  
50 Paintings  
Chubb Gallery  
2007

Raffaele D'Onofrio wants you to experience the intelligence of nature. His intimate paintings of trees, rivers and organic matter convey the complex 21<sup>st</sup> century truths, without sacrificing humanistic values, or the emotive power of ancient myths.

Using layered dimensions of interconnected patterns, organics shapes, kinetic textures and subtle color combinations, you're compelled to feel, not simply see the pictures. D'Onofrio's vibrant marks resonate through the entire field, giving every gesture plurality. At once familiar and mysterious, the tangled detail is mesmerizing. The chaotic tension heightens the emotive capacity of color and line, and stimulates the all the senses.

The fifty-framed canvases were hung closely together at eye level, several in vertical sets of three. Their small scale, (6x9 inches to 48x60 inches) forces you to move in for a closer look. There are three distinct series on display. The first, records raw, yet recognizable landscapes, the second, features abstract composition of organic forms, and the third, is loosely based on the Lowbrow art.

*Tree Walking*, offers a good example of D'Onofrio's "active surface". The painting features a single, gracefully positioned tree trunk, roughly painted; its branches hold up a gaseous cloud of shadowy color. D'Onofrio has hidden some elements from first glance with tonal coloring; it takes a moment for your eyes to actually register the whole image. The style, a head-on collision of Pointillism and Expressionism, has every surface vibrating with multi-colored slashes, dashes and dots, creating a visual rhythm that allows you to practically hear what you see.

Thanks to the visual barrage of the Information Age, D'Onofrio's paintings bring to mind divergent associations such as myths, science, god, global warming, and even cell phone radiation.

*Praying Without Ceasing* features four brown tree trunks placed at various distances to suggest depth. The trees "grow" inside a square that floats inside a framing band of textured color. The outer layer, or dimension, contains a greenish, rope-like net that covers the surface; floating around the net is a layer of thin orange loops, and below seed clusters form a web of their own. Beneath that, the trees are positioned, but they, too, are covered with striations of color and texture. The background that fills the inner square is filled with tiny blue dashes that speed off in all directions, and the outer frame contains white dashes, swimming in alignment against a turquoise background. Again, your eyes find multiple paths, and your mind, plausible interpretations.

The style of pure abstraction features two styles; the first brings to mind Aboriginal or Shaman art, while the second features pure organic shapes in a meditative context.

*Patterns And Routes (Maine Coast)* is an example of the first style. Flowing diagonally across the canvas like a fast moving stream, you see a swimming mass of currents, loops, worms, sticks and specks. Although the colors reference the earth, the composition implies water. His flexible style allows the painting to be read as a patterned, non-objective plane, as a stream filled with shoreline narratives and so on.

*Summer 2006*, painted in blues and yellows, presents an odd nest of sorts, filled with neatly arranged, multi-colored textures and four wilted, flower-like objects. Floating over the nest is a cell-like geometric form, and surrounds it is a wall filled with squiggly white lines. Cutting diagonally from the lower left to the upper right, there's a yellow band; the upper left and lower right corners contain blue patches dotted with white.

The final style presented is an updated version of "Bad" painting. These pieces offer sentiment, kitsch, craft and vague narratives expressed with a childlike directness. The subjects chosen by D'Onofrio reflects the familial influences of his mother, aunts, cousins, a sister and grandmothers; women ruled his childhood.

*Pears In The Garden* at first looks like an embroidered 19<sup>th</sup> century still life. Seven pears lie randomly across the surface of the canvas; three in the center are barely covered, revealing D'Onofrio's considerable painting skills. The other pieces of fruit, however, appear to be painted and sewn-over with stripes, while the background is "stitched" with a zigzag line. Glaze has been applied to certain areas using the effects of reflected light as an element in the composition. D'Onofrio butts illusion up against the flat plane, allowing our eyes and mind to rise and sink, believe the romance, or contemplate the formal properties of the painted plane, - all the while considering the simultaneous realities of the visible and invisible, reality and fantasy, and the boundaries that divide and connect them.

The longer you view a piece, the more D'Onofrio's interconnected web of life envelops your eyes and mind, creating a viewing experience that's both invigorating and meditative. You leave the show wanting to look carefully at nature again.