

Pictures at an Exhibition

Review of Ellen Mandelbaum's Opening

by J. Kenneth Leap, AGG Education Chair

AGG member artist, Ellen Mandelbaum recently had an exhibition of her work at the Community Gallery, 30 E. 35th St., New York City. Ellen's humble enthusiasm was evident in her post on the AGG message board: "We hung the show yesterday; it is small, very quiet, and I am so happy with it. It is just what I wanted."

I had the chance to attend the opening on September 25 which included Ellen's plein air watercolors and some of her autonomous glass panels. Ellen has a free style of painting which translates beautifully across both media. Her watercolors varied from impressionistic landscapes to purely abstract compositions. Her confident, unlabored brushstrokes were evident throughout.

As an introduction to the exhibit for the general public, Ellen displayed an artist's statement giving context about her watercolors and deconstructing some of her technical processes used in her glass panels. Written like a memoir, Ellen mentioned that her mother, who was also an artist, taught her to paint with watercolors as a child.

She wrote:

"I re-discovered watercolors on a visit to Haarlem, in the Netherlands. The beauty of a courtyard garden and also the spacious flat landscape of Holland inspired me. I found a child's set of eight cake watercolors in order to paint the beautiful Dutch landscape. Since then I have used them particularly when I have seen a spacious view of landscape in a beautiful light."



Painting by Ellen Mandelbaum

photo by J. Kenneth Leap



Ellen Mandelbaum

photo by J. Kenneth Leap

Many of the watercolors in the exhibition were created with this same simple palette. They resembled pages torn from a travel journal and bore pencil notions of where they were painted.

Her glass work displayed the same confident brushwork which only a seasoned painter can produce. She included one leaded panel in the exhibit which was a study of a liturgical commission for a Korean Methodist Church in Hawaii. But Ellen seemed most excited by her new work which explores the duality of reflected and transmitted light by introducing techniques outside the gamut of traditional glass painting. She is incorporating gilding using metal leaf and mica powders applied with gelatin to create reflective passages on the surfaces of her glass panels. The largest piece in the exhibition, dominating one wall of the gallery titled "Gilded Waves", demonstrated Ellen's mastery of this technique. Like the surf pounding against dark rocks, a series of gestural sweeps of gold build to a crescendo and crash into mist. This work, along with one other in the exhibition, was painted on Lexan which, Ellen commented, gave her the familiarity of the glass surface without the weight. Congratulations, Ellen.

To see more examples of Ellen work visit
www.emglassart.com