

## Judith Vivell exhibition at Clarke Galleries

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STOWE—The Birds of Judith Vivell, a splendid exhibition of oil paintings by the renowned bird artist, opens at the Clarke Galleries at Cold Comfort Farm Stowe, Vermont, on August 7, 2004, and runs through September 25th.

It is an extraordinary collection that masterfully melds the distinction between abstract artist and astute observer of nature. These informed portraits are as much explorations of light, color and form as they are records of magnificent feathered bi-peds.

Though each of the 30 monumental canvases depicts a different species, unequivocally all proclaim the high esteem in which Ms. Vivell holds her subject as a vehicle through which to explore her artistic impulses. From the stately Slattery Egret quietly stalking its prey to the face-to-face encounter with the inquisitive and colorful Impeyan, Ms. Vivell alternates between an idiosyncratic subjective realism and the abstract.

In some, such as Crawford's Kalij, a marvelous mantle of intricate feather patterns could substitute for a shawl emboldened with an abstract art deco design. In Whooping Crane I, the subject matter is treated almost in a cursory fashion without the precision of pattern but with all of the drama and verve that renders the essence of this vainglorious creature. There is no mistaking this is a proud and querulous crane.

From the cocky, barnyard rooster – nicknamed 'The Man' – to the more exotic, plumed Anhinga, Ms. Vivell juxtaposes her feathered friends against an unabashedly abstract, complimentary color field, neither natural nor surreal. The influence of colorists such as Hans Hoffman or Joseph Albers is unmistakable in these sensual backdrops.

Vivell said, "My formal training was as an abstract artist and this is evident in the context in which I place the birds - in strange, abstracted space. It is tangential to me where the birds are when I paint them. I am more interested in the shape of the head, the color around the eye. Atmosphere and space, form and color are all very important. Honestly, to me a bird is simply a beautiful object, like a rock or an apple or a chair. I paint an orchid the same way I paint a bird. It is an object that serves my purpose."

With no familiar references to distract from the avian subject matter at hand, each likeness is imbued with magisterial aplomb. One is struck by the indifference to human voyeurs and the utter self confidence and pride projected so effortlessly. Ms. Vivell does what accomplished bird and abstract artists before her have done – strips away any

sentimentality and leaves in its place a keen and passionate reverence for the process of art.

"People say my birds have such attitude. I paint only what I see and there is no fabrication or coyness in trying to give a particular bird a certain personality. The reason they look the way they do is that's what they look like. There's nothing sentimental or emotional. I have no interest in projecting a bird's personality."

Grier Clarke, owner and director of Clarke Galleries, said, "It's a thrill to have Judith Vivell's birds at the gallery. She is considered one of the most gifted bird artists in America today. Her innate ability to portray her subjects with such breathtaking sensibility – her colors, sense of space, attenuation of form are all astounding."

Indeed, in the catalogue that accompanied IV Centuries of Birds, a stunning exhibition of 145 bird artists organized and curated by Mr. Clarke in 2003, a color plate of a strutting, bellowing Whooping Crane by Ms. Vivell set a daring and confident tone as it accompanied the introduction by Christine Jackson. Most recently, Ms. Vivell was honored with a one person show at the Ward Museum of Waterfowl in Salisbury, MD. Ms. Vivell's work hangs in many public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Yale School of Architecture.

The Birds of Judith Vivell is exhibited in a converted 19th century Vermont dairy barn, a perfect site to bird watch in comfort. You don't have to be a bird lover or an ornithologist to appreciate these beautifully executed paintings, but don't be surprised if you become either after this remarkable show.

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