

cynthia byrnes contemporary art

Karen Silve Artist Statement

Silve was born in Springfield IL. Her mother, who is the daughter of an artist and a French chef, exposed Silve and her three siblings to art through visits to museums and classes. Silve's family moved a number of times during her childhood, finally settling in Tuscaloosa AL. She was involved with art through high school and went on to receive a BFA from the University of Alabama, whose painting faculty, including the Italian artist Alvin Sella, had a strong abstract orientation. A formative experience, especially for her color sense, was the summer Silve spent painting the landscape in France at the Leo Marchutz School in Aix-in-Provence. She currently maintains studios both in Portland and in the south of France.

As an undergraduate, Silve developed an interest in Post-Impressionist and Fauvist painting, and they informed her early figurative abstractions. She studied in the graduate painting and design programs at the University of Denver, creating abstract work that was inspired by the landscape, and by the color lessons she learned in France. Later, the Abstract Expressionist painters Willem de Kooning and Joan Mitchell, and the German artist Gerhard Richter became important influences on her work.

In 1993, Silve moved to Portland, Oregon, worked in graphic design and began to explore painterly process in a series of meditative paintings. In the late 1990s, she created two extended groups of paintings, first the Musician Series, and then the Cellist Series. Both series focused on players with their instrument, and on a feeling for music expressed through abstracting the human figure, gestural brush strokes and vibrant color.

Silve has acknowledged the role of personal experience in shaping her work. In 2006, the death of a pet and the illness of a friend both moved her to find a new mode to express her own inner reality through painting. The work that emerged involved rhythmic, calligraphic brush strokes and drips of paint. Evolving from this period is the ongoing series of abstract paintings that Silve continues to create. Crucial to these paintings is their physical immediacy and their connection with the natural world. Silve expresses this as being "within nature", and includes the sights, smells and memories that an encounter in the world can generate. The artist's involvement with nature extends to her activities as a gardener, hiker and biker. Some of her current paintings draw upon the markets she encountered during a recent trip to Mexico.

In 2008, while working on a series of green paintings inspired by the forests of Oregon, Silve found a way to "create the dynamism of the moment" by turning to the computer to aid her in restructuring a painting in progress. She has also used Photoshop to create digital collages, using element of existing paintings, to serve as a studies for a new canvases.

Silve has exhibited her work extensively in solo exhibitions including at the Portland Performing Arts Center, the Forsyth Center Gallery at Texas A&M University, the Visual Art Center of Northwest Florida, the Tuscaloosa Performing Arts Center and the West Linn Public Library in Oregon. Group exhibitions include those at The Institute for American Universities, Aix-in-Provence, France, the Jemison-Carnegie Heritage Hall, Talledega AL, and the Art in Embassies Program, Doha, Qatar.