

M e m o r i e s



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The art of Angela Tirrell

By GARY BRADY-HERNDON
Register Staff Writer

NAPA

At some point in every artist's life, a decision, whether conscious or not, is made to direct their talent in one particular aspect of their work or to forge ahead in the hope that their art, like life, is an ever-expanding entity.

The pull to focus on one aspect of an artist's craft, however, can be intense. Rent, food, bills and the lure of not living the starving artist's life are all factors that must be considered.

Many artists find a niche where they can sell their work and apply their energy into that area, only to wake up a year, 10 years or a lifetime down their career path bored, burnt out and disillusioned.

Napa artist, Angela Tirrell, found herself in that position eight years ago. As the successful owner of a mural company in New York

City, she worked with clients on site-specific commissions up and down the east coast. She readily admits her career was a success and the future looked rosy, yet something was missing.

"I came from a very strong commercial background. The budgets, site requirements, building restorations — began to define me professionally. I was good at what I did, with many satisfied clients," Tirrell said. "I felt I had done that — listening to clients' wants and creating their ideas. I felt like I had reached a dead end."

Circumstances provided Tirrell a chance to reassess the way her career was moving. Relocating west to San Francisco to be near her ailing mother, she settled back into the city, where she had spent her childhood, to sort things out and take stock of her life and career.

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Above, "Evening" in oil and silica, 40 x 60 inches, by Angela Tirrell. Left, "Evening Branch," oil on two 18 x 18 inch canvases.



Tirrell

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After a series of deaths, both in her family and of friends, she felt the need to change her environment. Tirrell moved to St. Helena for a short time, then on to Napa where she bought a house.

"I didn't come here to be an artist," she said. "If you're a painter, though, it goes with you."

Tirrell started looking for direction in her life and art by painting about death and loss. She found inspiration in odd moments and occurrences.

Once a BBC broadcast of a massacre in Africa of a group of women and children at a river crossing inspired her to paint a piece about the emotions she felt about the event. The result is a montage of colors and textures that speaks more of healing than of death, she said.

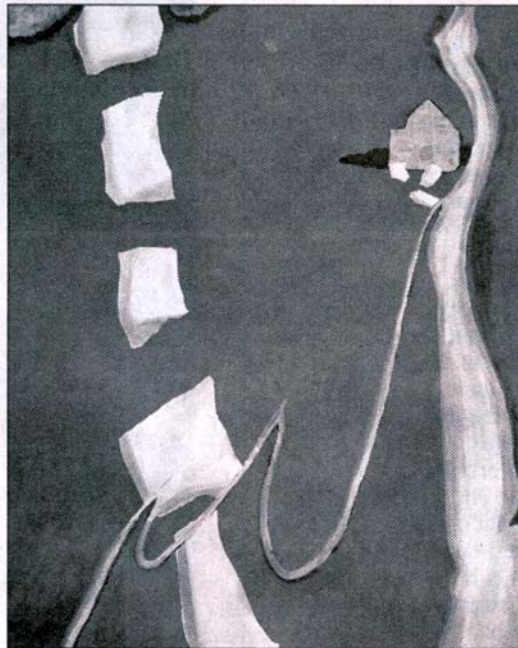
As time passed, she began to notice change in her paintings, which she attributes partially to the California environment and her new home.

"To a great degree, my environment influences me. [For years in New York] I dreamed of California — the forest dark greens and the sear color of the hills in summer — wheat and dark green hues," Tirrell said.

"Having access to fruit trees and a garden seemed magical," she noted about her home in Napa.

The influence of nature and the valley on her work has been beneficial, Tirrell said. Today, she tends to paint in series, still reflecting emotional loss at times, but focusing on nature as a source of healing and as regenerative source that guides her current artistic cycle.

Always questioning and changing, Tirrell is using more photographs in her work to capture the world outside the valley.



A commissioned work by Napa artist Angela Tirrell, done in oils on a 48 by 60 inch canvas.

With the rise in popularity of digital images and the clarity they offer the artist's eye, she sees them as beneficial to a point, but with a caveat.

With the current onslaught of images, and more to come in the future, she questions what the bombardment of hundreds, if not thousands, of images daily will have on artists and society as a whole. Tirrell fears a disconnection will arise to places people have never seen in reality, but have only viewed through the images of a picture or video screen.

"Are we getting burned out and unable to remember, to feel?" she asked. "I'm looking back to time in my childhood when I spent time in nature — sitting in an avocado tree reading a book, for example — it was a slower pace," Tirrell said with regret.

Her upcoming exhibit reflects a back-to-the-basics trend in her artistic style and is an expression where she has evolved since coming to California, she said.

"These paintings are about determination — about not feeling loss — but interacting with

memory and the moment," she noted.

While she still has fond memories of her decorative mural painting days, Tirrell said she is happy the move to California allowed her the freedom to work on free-standing canvases and a greater range of expression.

"I'm not willing to repeat the same thing over and over. I don't want to be put into a box. So long as a painting speaks to me — as long as the paintings speak for themselves and have integrity — I'm happy. I'm just having fun pushing paint around," Tirrell said with a laugh.

Angela Tirrell's work will be on display at the SoCo Gallery, Arts Council of Napa Valley, 68 Coombs Street, D-4, Napa. The exhibit runs from May 17 through June 30. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., or by appointment. A reception to meet the artist will be held May 17 from 5 to 8 p.m. For information call the ACNV at 707-257-2117.

Gary Brady-Herndon can be reached at 256-2219 or at gherndon@napanews.com

