

Mixed mediums

EXHIBIT / HAMMOND HARKINS GALLERIES

A broader palette

Painter's show goes beyond landscapes he's known for

By Peter Tonguette | For The Columbus Dispatch

Painter Paul Hamilton should not be pigeonholed. Although the Granville resident is known for his landscapes of locales in Ohio, an exhibit of new works at Hammond Harkins Galleries in the Short North underscores the wide range of colors on his palette.

Featured in the show are interiors, abstract works and a pair of sculptures in addition to his traditional landscapes.

The exhibit title — “The Beginnings of Journeys ...” — refers to the diversity of works on view.

“I do journey off into different directions,” said Hamilton, adding that he wanted the exhibit to highlight his breadth as an artist.

Among the show surprises: a series of solemn figurative works.

“I don't think I've ever exhibited a human figure in any of my paintings,” Hamilton said.

In the oil-on-canvas “Like the Idle Rains of Summer,” a female figure sits at an easel positioned in front of two large windows. Light streams in, reflecting on the wood floors and the unoccupied seat of a swivel chair. The image prompts the viewer to ask: Why does the figure remain inside on what is clearly such a lovely day?

Indeed, in the oil-on-panel “Of this Glittering and Perpetual silence,” a female figure seems tempted by the outdoors, having turned her head from the empty easel at which she is seated to a window visible at the edge of the frame.

If these haunting paintings tell a story, perhaps it reaches a conclusion in the oil-on-panel “And Silence Now Is All”: The people in several other pictures having departed, a cat is left alone to rest beneath a cushioned chair. Blinding



“Geo Mod-Mod”

At a glance

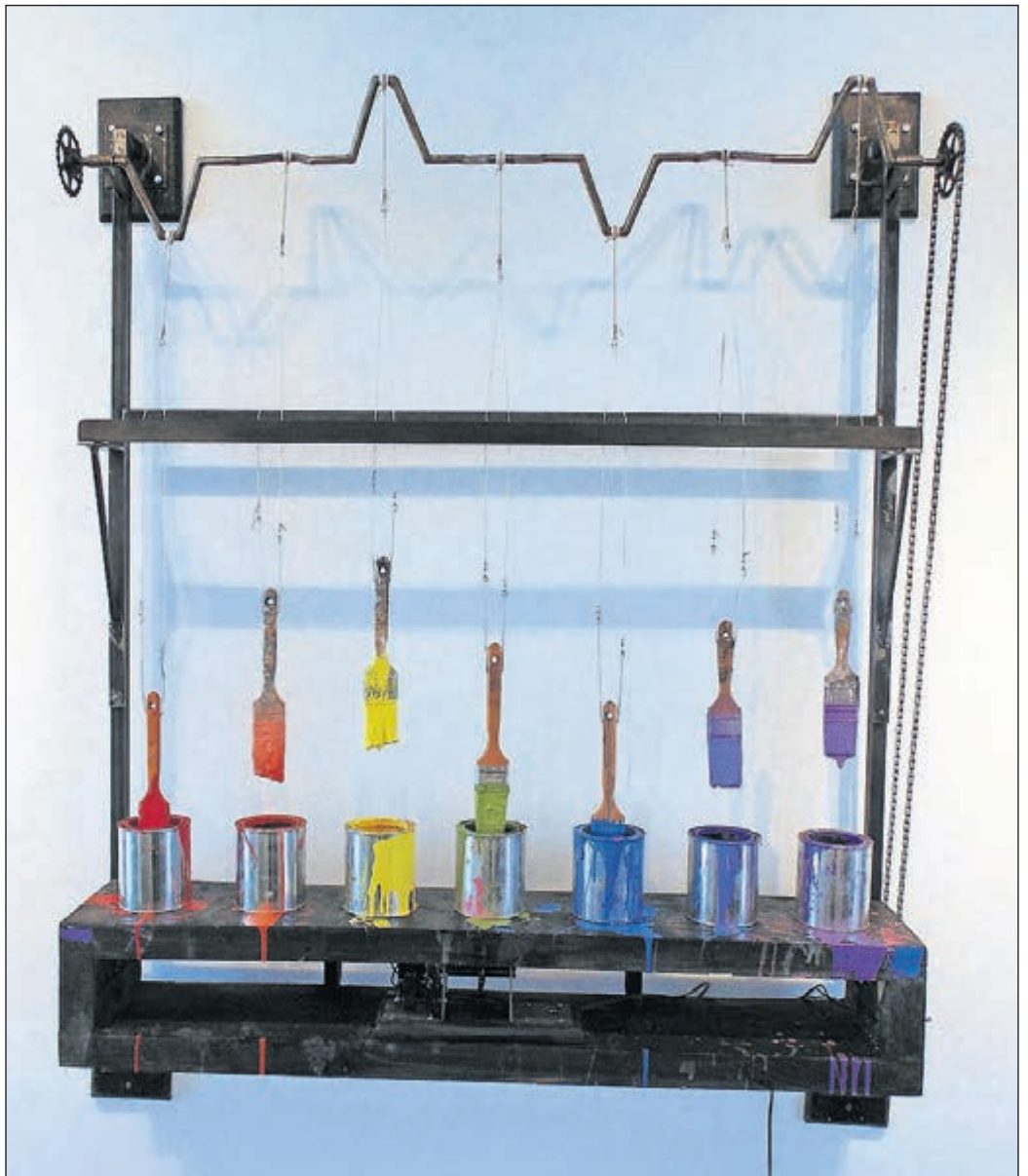
■ “Paul Hamilton: The Beginnings of Journeys ...” continues through May 1 at Hammond Harkins Galleries, 641 N. High St. Hours: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays. The artist will give a talk at 2 p.m. May 1. Call 614-238-3000, or visit www.hammondharkins.com.

light comes through a door and a window; on the sill of the latter is a miniature version of the statue “Venus de Milo” — an unexpected allusion to ancient Greece.

With its crisscrossing grid of colors, the abstract acrylic-on-panel “Geo Mod-Mod” is also atypical of Hamilton. And, unlike the work of, say, Frank Stella, the colors bleed across the design.

“Certainly, doing a geometric thing, I wanted to keep them loose and sort of free,” Hamilton said. “There are a lot of drips and kind of surface texture that add to that quality.”

Upon entering the gallery, visitors encounter two surprising sculptures, including an immense



“Paint the Town,” inspired by the U.S. Supreme Court's gay-marriage ruling

representation of a humpback whale — crafted of aluminum over a wooden frame — hanging from the ceiling. The work — 20 feet long and 13 feet wide — is rooted in the artist's youthful fondness for the animal.

“Ever since I was a little, little kid, I've always done drawings of whales,” said the California native, who spent his childhood on Merritt Island, Florida. “So I tried to translate it ... How could I show my affinity for whales and their level of beauty, really?”

Even more inventive is the motorized mixed-media work “Paint the Town.” Seven canisters of paint are displayed on a shelf; above each is a paintbrush, which is dunked into a corresponding canister, emerging coated in one of a

spectrum of colors.

The ingenious and powerful work, inspired by the June U.S. Supreme Court ruling in which same-sex marriage was legalized, is “the first political piece that I've done,” Hamilton said.

“I was watching the news, and equality was big, and one of the guys said, ‘We're going to paint the town,’” Hamilton said. “And I thought, ‘Well, that's pretty amazing, but they're going to need a machine or something, because that's nationwide.’”

Hence, Hamilton's piece, which takes the expression literally.

Fans of Hamilton's landscapes need look no farther than the back wall of the gallery, on which 60 small- and medium-sized oils-on-panel are arranged

in the shape of the Buckeye State. “Ohio Landscapes” depicts an array of scenes, including storm clouds hovering over a farm, black-and-white cows congregating in a field and numerous rural roads.

Yet — in keeping with the unexpected quality of the show overall — several landscapes are marked by a mood of mystery, as in an oil-on-canvas (titled, in part, “She Looked Like a Woman Mesmerized”) in which the only sign of life in the yard of a handsome red-brick farmhouse is a flock of crows.

The singular show presents an artist stretching himself in bold — and frequently breathtaking — ways.

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