

This is an excerpt from an article that appeared in Images West magazine, Summer 2009 issue, titled "Beyond Paint and Bronze" by Katy Niner

precede a bird she ultimately mastered in three brushstrokes. As such, negative space defines her compositions as much as color. While some features are defined – a spire or lake – overall, her paintings remain ambiguous.

"People seem to invent the rest of the picture from my suggestions," she says.

Sumi-e's spontaneity belies the skill required to master the brushstrokes, derived from calligraphy, and its tools: bamboo-handled brushes, sumi (stick ink) and rice paper. After years of intensive study, she quit her job and turned to art full-time in 1987, shifting solely to sumi-e about a decade ago.

Beyond brushwork, color travels by tipping or blowing (a winter Quick Draw witnessed Stratman wielding a hair dryer). Surprises abound: blending brings out unexpected colors; some mixtures move quickly while others creep. She adds details – snowflakes or trees – once the surface dries.

Considering this delicate play between medium and artist, the koi presented a challenge: Stratman would have to maintain a dry patch for the fish amidst a color pond of moisture. An early miniature yielded a fiery fish perched in a whirling pool. Featherly fins were the only evidence of Stratman's cautious

A gallery setting brings mixed media artists together and collectively initiates viewers to see differently. The mixed media gathering at Center Street Gallery reinvents various traditions. Swerving from bronze,

Siri Hollander creates boisterous animal sculptures in concrete. Meanwhile, Jeffrey Jon Gluck abstracts a traditional medium, bronze, by manipulating patinas into minimalist landscapes.

Kay Stratman sets a new course for an Asian art tradition – brush painting. Center Street Galley will host a reception for her from 5 to 8 p.m. on Aug. 20.

Recently keen on capturing a koi fish, Stratman knew better than to expect an aquatic outcome from sumi-e. As a student of the centuries-old technique of Asian brush painting, she embraces the medium's "controlled spontaneity," a dualism defined by water's will to change her brushstroke intentions.

"If you have a preconceived idea of what you want the end result to be, you may be – if not disappointed – surprised because oftentimes the painting or colors will blend in a way you didn't expect," she says. *Glory Day* began as a seascape, only to become a mountain scene. Snow started as a cloud.

Stratman pares subjects to their most essential forms: Many practice pieces



"I spent years mastering (if I ever will) brushstrokes in traditional painting," she wrote in an e-mail. "[I] didn't feel comfortable moving on to more contemporary landscapes until I put in my time learning my 'scales,' if you equate it to music – sort of a transition from classical to jazz."

Now, when she teaches workshops on sumi-e, she begins by polling students for watercolor experience. To those with hands raised, she instructs, "Forget everything you know."

As Stratman moves in contemporary directions, she remains committed to its perspective of a bird flying through a scene, rather than static within it.

In recent years, she has ventured into p'o mo, or splash ink, painting, an ancient Chinese technique of applying watercolors thickened to the consistency of ice cream on shikishi board – a paper board layered with gold or silver metallic, then rice paper and finished with gold trim. The metallic lends luminescence, and the rice paper texture. A top wash of water incites movement.

LEFT: Asian brush painting takes skill to harness the spontaneity of the water-willed medium. Kay Stratman's myriad practice pieces resulted in this painting, *Not So Koi*. ABOVE: Monica Aiello layers fiber, ink, glass, wood, stone and varnish on her pieces, like *West of Pele*, *North of Babar*. She shows at Diehl Gallery.

meeting of wet and dry.

In a later iteration – *Not So Koi* – she masterfully controls the spontaneity. The koi swims within its skin and the marbled pool surrounding it. Color whips blur fish and water.

At the end, Stratman adds her chop, a stone carved with a symbol, word or character that serves as an artist's signature and is integral to the composition as all other elements. Stratman's chop evokes the Chinese saying: "If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come."

The green bough and the singing bird clue her aesthetic intentions, but final interpretation relies on the viewer. Those keen to quest can seek out the myriad clues left by mixed media artists on the walls of Jackson galleries. ■