

Cade Tompkins Projects
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Kaleidoscope of colors, patterns enlivens space

Bill Van Sien, The Providence Journal, Thursday, April 4th, 2013

For the past few years, the gallery run by Providence art dealer Cade Tompkins has been an oasis of Minimalist cool in an area better known for its stately older homes and buildings. Step inside and it's easy to imagine that you've wandered into a fancy "white box" New York gallery by mistake. (Actually, the gallery, Cade Tompkins Projects, is in the heart of the East Side, across from the Wheeler School.



Ode to Wolfe E. Myrow, Courtesy Cade Tompkins Projects

These days, however, the gallery is sporting a decidedly different look. Thanks to Coral Bourgeois, a Pawtucket artist who specializes in large-scale collage and mixed-media pieces, the gallery's formerly all-white walls have been covered with a dizzying mix of colors and patterns: zigzags and curlicues, diamonds and checkerboards, paisleys and polka dots, Asian floral prints and Islamic geometric patterns.

And that's just the beginning. By juxtaposing patterns with starkly different backgrounds and graphic qualities - a jazzy Op Art swirl, for example, paired with a traditional Japanese bamboo print - Bourgeois ups the ante even more. Look long enough and your eyes may need CPR.

A good example of Bourgeois' pattern-blending skill can be found in "Layers", a 2009 work that greets visitors as they enter the gallery's main viewing space. Measuring roughly 8 feet high by 13 feet wide, it consists of several dozen smaller panels, each featuring its own eye-grabbing blend of colors and patterns. In one, a series of red, yellow and white circles floats above a vibrant zebra-print pattern. In another, a series of even larger circles is paired with a black-and-white pattern borrowed from Japanese textiles. In another panel, a repeating red-and-black diamond pattern suggests an Islamic influence.

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Throw all of these disparate patterns together in one piece and the result could easily be a disaster. Yet Bourgeois has such a sure command of color - and such a keen (if free-wheeling) graphic sense - that it all somehow works.

A former jewelry designer (her clients included Barneys and Henri Bendel), Bourgeois also has a fondness for materials that shine and sparkle. A panel decorated with a series of Op Art spirals, for example, would be pretty eye-catching on its own. But Bourgeois doesn't (and perhaps can't) stop there. At the center of each spiral she's placed a gleaming paste-jewelry "ruby" - a touch that not only gives the spiral pattern some added zing but adds to the dizzying array of reds (everything from pale pink to hot cherry) that are woven throughout the entire piece.

As a final touch, Bourgeois also covers each of her large panels with a coat of clear resin. Besides protecting the surface, the resin creates a shiny, glass-like finish that reflects whatever happens to be placed in front of it. In a gallery setting, with dozens of panels placed in close proximity to each other, the effect is dizzying - like stepping into a giant kaleidoscope.

The rest of the show offers similar evidence of Bourgeois' pattern-juggling skills. Another big multi-part piece, "Ode to Wolf E. Myrow" features a series of patterns and colors combinations inspired by Indian textiles. (The title, meanwhile, is a nod to Wolf E. Myrow, Inc., one of the last vestiges of Providence's costume-jewelry industry and a favorite bargain-hunting site for local artists and designers.)

Indian images also turn up in "Dreaming of India" a 2010 work that mixes abstract floral and geometric patterns with more recognizable images. Among them; the Taj Mahal (here rendered in deep, sapphire blue) and a woman (in deep purple-blue with red highlights) wearing a traditional Indian head scarf and jewelry.

Another work, "If you Only Knew", should appeal to the Anglophiles in the audience. Done almost exclusively in shades of blue (with a few hot pinks and lavenders thrown in for good measure), it features patterns and images drawn from a variety of sources including British painting, sculpture and architecture.

Perhaps not coincidentally, several images evoke the reign of Queen Victoria - another period in which color and pattern were allowed to run wild.

Through April 27 at Cade Tompkins Projects, 198 Hope Street, Providence, Gallery hours: Sat. 10am-6pm or by appointment. For more information, call (401) 751-4888 or visit cadetompkins.com