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Finding Beauty, Complexity and Meaning in Art

By Sophie Braccini



Elizabeth Jameson in front of her painting "Valentine" Photo Sophie Braccini

The new "Flesh and Mind" art exhibit opened Feb. 21 at Jennifer Perlmutter Gallery in Lafayette. The three exhibiting artists share a mix of intellectual, technical and sensitive approaches that lead them to create unique and powerful pieces. Among them is Lafayette artist Elizabeth Jameson, who uses MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging scans) of her own nervous system attacked by multiple sclerosis to create beautiful pieces that are displayed all over the world.

The story of Jameson is one of passion and transcendence. A young lawyer who specialized in health care advocacy for the underprivileged, she was diagnosed with MS almost 25 years ago. The disease first affected her speech, but she regained it later. "I was very disturbed by my lack of fluidity with words," she remembers. "I went to a local art class ... and after one class I knew I wanted to become an artist. I felt I could change the world through art." Jameson took every art class she could find. "I knew it was where I was supposed to be," she says. Early on her love of colors developed and she produced mostly floral/abstract art.

But a part of her was thinking that her art was selfish and, for an activist like herself, she needed a cause. "(I realized) that the only thing that makes sense to me (are) my MRIs," she says. "What is the symbol of MS? The technology of MRIs is so

profound, the images are so disturbing." Jameson looked at these black and white images and thought: "Maybe if I took these images and made something meaningful from it, maybe that would be my contribution to finding beauty, complexity and art in the most graphic symbol of MS."

Jameson feels that technology has a profound effect on people. "When people saw me, they would ask, 'How is your MRI?' instead of 'How are you?' We trust technology more than our personal narrative."

Jameson does solar etching on the MRI's photographic paper, taking parts of the images before making a print using Charbonnel etching inks. "I pursue an art practice that engages my fascination for the disease ... the beauty and the ugliness. You can look at the art and see something human, so the human narrative is not lost in the technology," she explains.

The images she creates are strikingly vibrant and beautiful. It could be considered abstract art to the non-medical professional, because it is sometimes hard to recognize what is being presented, but it always engages a deep emotional response. Jameson says that neurosurgeons love their MRI images and the fact that she adds more dimensionality makes them proud. Other physicians who spend all day looking at the scans find that the etching adds incredible meaning.

Jameson's work is recognized internationally and is in permanent collections in the United States, Spain and Canada. The woman who is now in a wheelchair is nonetheless brimming with new projects, including using diffusion tensor imaging (DTI) in her art.

She will have a solo show at Jennifer Perlmutter Gallery in June. The current exhibit runs through March 21 at 3620 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette. For information, visit

jenniferperlmuttergallery.com or Jameson Fine Art at jamesonfineart.com.
Two Other Artists Featured in the "Flesh and Mind" Exhibit

Kerry Sorrenson paints abstract landscapes and figures in oils by color mapping digital images to create a topographical effect of shape and contrast that is uniquely beautiful.

Polly Frizzell uses shadow to explore the convergence of intangible and material bodies. "The surfaces I create look the way they do because I'm interested in the way materials have been 'brutalized' - clay in the fire of the kiln, dirt and plants torn apart by floodplains, urban decay."

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