

AT THE GALLERIES

# Reeves paintings find a memorable place at Lemberg

BY FRANK PROVENZANO  
STAFF WRITER

In the near future, painter Jennifer Reeves will probably have to find another studio. With the next warming spell, she expects the alarming invasion of weeds to invade the barn in Howell where she works and lives. No matter. By now, the former Birmingham resident has plenty of experience finding her place.

If there's any doubt, just examine the rapid evolution and refinement of her painting in the past three years. On Thursday, her most recent paintings, "In Place," will be shown at the Lemberg Gallery in Birmingham. The exhibit runs through April 28.

"Chasing the evasive muse has

led Reeves from a studio in Brooklyn to a two-year stint in Paris and finally to her idyllic rural retreat northwest of metro Detroit. But for anyone who appreciates the rigorous approach artists take to transform place into personal dramas, then Reeves' relentless journey of self-discovery shows that there's plenty of depth behind her fine brush strokes.

"Her work doesn't look like any other painter," said Darlene Carroll, director of the Lemberg Gallery. "You just don't come up with a list of artists whose influence you can see (in her paintings)."

Reeves is now represented by the Lemberg. Until last summer, her work was managed through the Alexa Leo Gallery in

Ann Arbor. When that gallery closed, Reeves went looking for a gallery that exhibited bold and adventurous works. Although the Lemberg had already a full staple of national and international artists, Reeves fit their selection criterion as a strong and innovative painter.

During her days in New York and Paris, Reeves' style appeared strikingly similar to Anselm Kiefer's authoritative expressionism. "I loved Kiefer when I thought my paintings had to be all heart," said Reeves, who wanted to avoid what she called the Minimalist's intention to "paint only from the head."

In the last three years, her work has evolved from emotionally cathartic paintings into a refined, less obtrusive style, wholly

her own. "It's about finding the balance between the head and heart struggle," she said.

While Reeves' recent paintings have introduced representational objects, the emotional depth has hardly diminished. Sometimes she begins with a sketch. Other times, Reeves starts with a blank canvas, slowly filling in images from her visual lexicon.

A common image in her "In Place" series is a barn, wooden fence and rolling hills. While the realistic rendering draws in the viewer, the stark abstractions of pencil scribbles and heavy layers of multi-color acrylics seem ready to drip from the canvases. The ease and timeliness of her landscape paintings are sharply contrasted with blasts from her personal emotional reservoir.

Initially, it seemed that Reeves kept her passion for painting to herself. During her school years at Southeast, the 1981 grad focused on theater and music. Even in the fine arts program at Principia College in Illinois, she chose to pursue singing. It wasn't until the mid 1980s when she attended Vermont Studio School that she received a formal education in



Balance of head and heart: Jennifer Reeves' recent paintings, "In Place," appear at the Lemberg Gallery in Birmingham.

painting. In hindsight, the years spent in formal training seem like the classic case of "you can teach the technique of painting, but you can't teach an artist how to see."

The timing of the Lemberg exhibit, according to Reeves, 34, comes at a watershed moment in her career. As the focus in her paintings have sharpened, she's gained the attention of a critical audience. This month's "Art In America" features a review of her fall exhibit, held at the Roger Smith Gallery in New York.

Meanwhile, the collective effect of "In Place" at the Lemberg is an intimate connection, a transference of deep feeling and

wanderlust. Reeves challenges the viewer to see that while nature follows logical principles, the difference between freedom and irrationality is in the eye of the beholder.

For that lasting impression, perhaps Reeves most striking accomplishment is her gutsy independence. "I want to be a pioneering painter," she said. "Even when I began painting, I did it my own way."

In her studio barn, painting near the window overlooking the rural Howell landscape, Reeves seems content. For now, she's found a place where she can see an open field as far as her eye can see.

ARTBEAT

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AFM ARTS GRANTS

The Arts Foundation of Michigan (AFM) has announced the Creative Artist Grant for funding year 1998. Proposed projects of applicants must begin Oct. 1, 1997 and conclude by Sept. 30, 1998. AFM makes project grants up to \$7,000 available to artists. Application deadline is p.m. on Tuesday, June 3, 1997. To receive guidelines and application, send a stamped, self-

addressed envelope to: Creative Artist Grant, Arts Foundation of Michigan, 645 Griswold St., Ste. 2154, Detroit, 48226, (313) 964-2244.

Creative Artist Grant workshop will be held on Monday, March 31 at the Southfield Civic Center, Rm. 111, (810) 354-9034.

A WOMAN'S VISION

Womencenter at Oakland Community College, Orchard Ridge Campus, is calling for entries for the 11th annual art show, "Our Visions: Women in Art." Entries will be accepted in visual art and poetry. Deadline: Tuesday, April 1. Exhibit will take place May 9-30 in the Smith Theatre Gallery at the OCC Orchard Ridge Campus.

Call (810) 471-7602, or write: Womencenter at Oakland Community College, 27055 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills 48334.

MADELANA RESCHEDULED

The rescheduled performance of the operetta "Madelana" will be Friday, April 4 at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College, located at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, just south of I-98 in Farmington Hills.

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