

/art review

By Marc Awodey

EXHIBIT: **Gail Salzman**, abstract oil paintings.
Doll-Anstadt Gallery, Burlington. Through May.

ARTWORK: "**Matter & Spirit 2**" by **Gail Salzman** photo Marc Awodey

The Layered Look

Gail Salzman is a constantly evolving artist with a uniquely evocative approach to abstraction. Her exhibition of 10 nonobjective paintings at the Doll-Anstadt Gallery captures the spirit of the landscape without specifically referencing physical locales. The show is entitled "Convergence," and a curatorial statement for the exhibition discloses, "As translucent paint layers overlap, Salzman watches for the turning point, a convergence when the immediate sensual experience intersects with evoked memories."

Her works are particularly attentive to the ever-shifting moods of water. It would be easy to say Salzman is painting reflections of the surfaces of moving water, but she is much less literal than that.

"Counterpoint" is a 30-by-36-inch oil in which flattened, translucent forms sometimes bear jagged edges, like tissue paper torn for collage. Among Salzman's hues are dark olive greens, such as might be seen in a pond with decaying leaves. But there is also a clean crimson near the lower edge of the canvas. A few opaque turquoise lines also meander around the picture plane.

"Turning" is another 30-by-36-inch canvas. Its colors include the rusty browns of autumn, icy blues and cold greens. Closely cropped white paint drips inch horizontally over some parts of the painting's surface, while broad, dancing brushstrokes scumble over others.

"April Duet" and "June Duet" are horizontal 22-by-13-inch works on panel, constructed with two conjoined 11-by-13-inch squares. Neither is really a diptych, as their images are completely unified. "April Duet" gives the illusion of dimension with a Mobius strip of green and raw umber in the center of its composition. "June Duet" includes scarlet and crimson sinews of color floating over cool grays and intense yellows. Organic bundles of ruddy strands, like roots, run along the righthand edge of the piece.

Salzman's "Matter & Spirit" series consists of three vertical 22-by-13-inch conjoined panel works. "Matter & Spirit 2" falls downward like a mountain rivulet, or a Chinese brush painting on that theme. It may be the most naturalistic work in the show, specifically because of the illusion of gravity it presents. Grays and lilac layered over orange and sienna echo the hues of autumn.

"Matter & Spirit 3" seems precariously top-heavy in comparison. Its darkest and most opaque values are in the upper panel, while translucent orange and cobalt blue hues swim in the lower panel.

Details in Salzman's paintings reveal her tactile virtuosity. Swaths of raw color, varied glazes, a welter of brushstrokes, drips and smears all claim center stage in different passages. Salzman's ribbons of form behave in equally creative ways -- overlapping, abutted or sometimes not quite touching. Their movements seem beautifully choreographed rather than spontaneous.

The 32-by-36-inch oil-on-linen piece from which the exhibit takes its name is less naturalistic than most of the works in the show. The composition is based on slightly bowed verticals that loosely alternate between deep, fiery reds and pale, luminous yellows. The two dominant hues converge as their distinct layers merge into focus. Strands of scarlet are tangled at the upper-left and lower-right corners. If it has any reference to nature, it is to blood vessels, lava flows and combinations of the two.

But Salzman is primarily an abstractionist. Where her abstractions converge with landscape is in her approach to rhythm and hue. The Latin root words of "abstract" mean "to draw from" or "separate." Salzman separates moods and emotions from the natural world to create classically abstract paintings.

