

The Columbus Dispatch

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH | Weekender | THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2005

VISUAL ARTS

Spray painter makes graffiti more respectable

"You can't tell a book by its cover," Daina Higgins replied when told she didn't look the type to be scrambling around abandoned buildings and industrial sites.

Well, she didn't.

Not when she was dressed demurely for the opening of her exhibit "Flaneur" in the Miranova Gallery operated by Rebecca Ibel.

Higgins, a Columbus native, is a graffiti artist gone a little bit mainstream.

Graffiti might be a fine way, in some eyes, of decorating the post-industrial

landscape. But for a 26-year-old such as Higgins, it's not a good way to make a living.

She uses the graffiti artist's favorite tool, the spray-paint can, to create fine art.

Not too long ago, Higgins was one of those lurking around the Smith Bros. Hardware Building in its derelict years, and the old Columbus Auto Parks factory on the North Side, spray-painting walls.

"I wrote graffiti for years and years. . . . That's where I really felt comfortable" artistically.

She graduated in fine arts from Fort Hayes Arts and Academic High School in 1997, then attended the School of Visual Arts in New York, where she lives.

"I really wanted to bring this graffiti persona and this fine-art persona together," she said.

So she does, thanks to cans of Rustoleum Satin.

She takes photos of scenes, sketches them and, with the help of paper stencils to delineate portions of the scenes, starts spray-painting.

Her pieces are on panels 6 inches square. Most are black and white; some have a touch of color. They are based on scenes in New York and Columbus.

Lazarus, a diptych, features a set of display windows in the closed Downtown department store. *Pine Street* shows a tough-looking alley.

From a distance, some of the scenes look foggy, mysterious — even ominous.

Close up, the complexities of the scene catch the eye, and the challenges of the painting process become clear. And, up close, the paint looks like spray paint.



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Daina Higgins with two of her paintings — *Charm*, above, and *Skidded Out* — at the Miranova Gallery

"I want the integrity of the flecks of paint to be very evident," Higgins said.

She remains loyal to graffiti.

"It's a stigmatized medium. I wanted to show people in my little way that it can be very beautiful."

"Flaneur" continues through Feb. 26 at the Miranova Gallery, 2 Miranova Place. Paintings by Duncan Hannah, another New Yorker, also are on display. Hours: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and 7 to 9 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Call 614-291-2555.

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