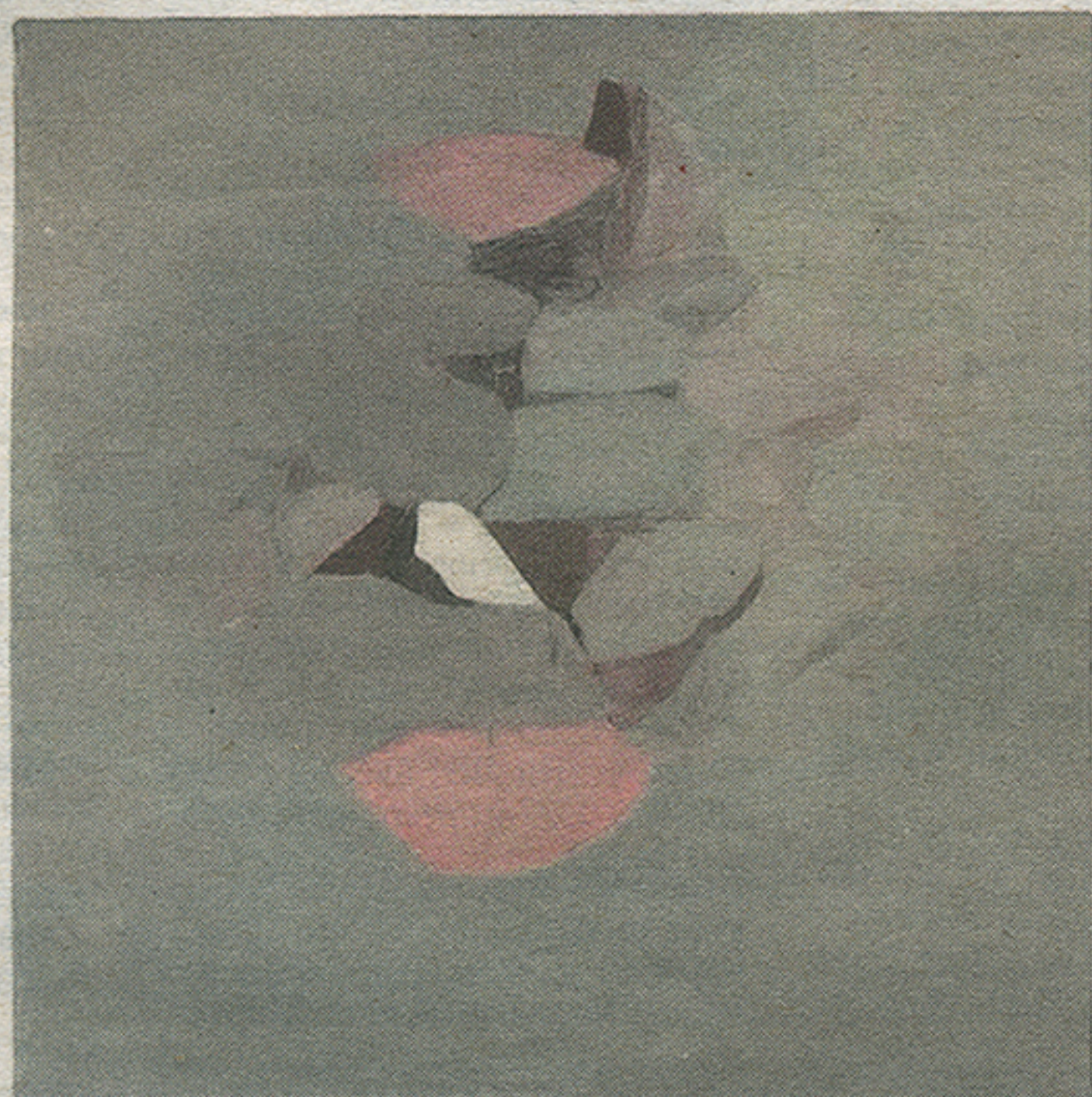
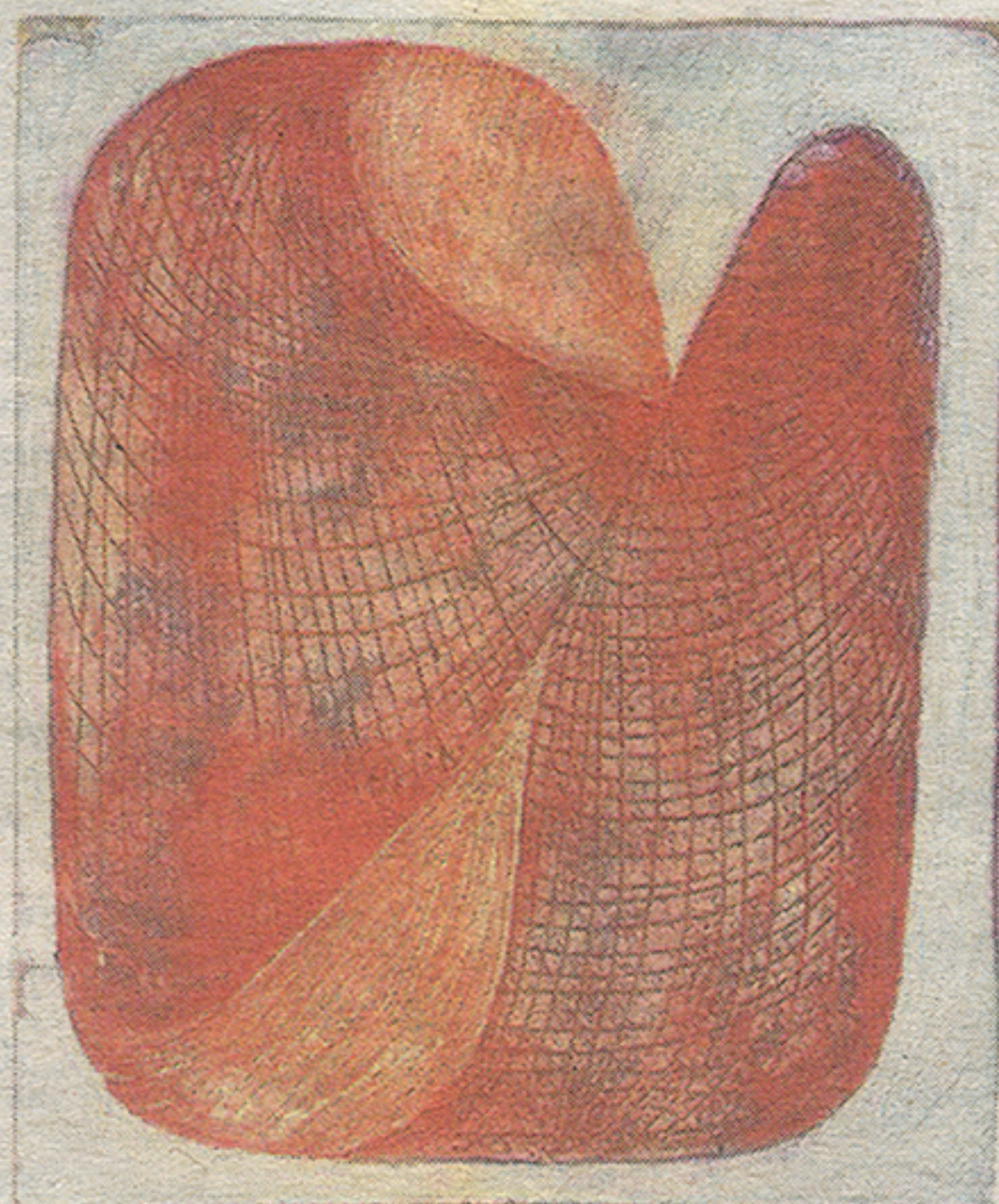


The personal and the abstract



ART AND SOUL

Emily Gherard, "Untitled," (2013), oil on canvas.



BRIAN CYPHER

Brian Cypher, "Hold and Fold" (2014), mixed media on panel.

By GARY FAIGIN
Special to *The Seattle Times*

Artists and artisans seeking alternatives to the big city have always been drawn to picturesque locations, like tiny Edison (pop. 130) in the Skagit Valley, whose funky storefronts now house bakeries, restaurants, a boutique and two serious (non-tourist) art galleries. The just-opened i.e., run by two expat Seattle painters, has already featured several strong shows, and this month's two-person exhibition featuring Emily Gherard and Brian Cypher is no exception.

Both Gherard and Cypher create work which is uncompromisingly personal and gritty, eschewing easily recognizable imagery for abstract or nearly abstract compositions emphasizing materials and process.

Gherard's work is darker, more worked and highly meditative, purged of all but the most subtle color and playing with the fluid boundaries that separate depth from flatness, objects in the real world from concepts in the artist's mind. Her two subjects — walls and rocks — allow her to indulge her love of surface, as both walls and rocks can support any manner of texture or smoothness, achieved here by a long and complicated process of building up, scraping back, layering on, and mixing both wet and dry media. Both Gherard's and Cypher's

EXHIBITION REVIEW

Brian Cypher, Emily Gherard

11 a.m.-5 p.m. Fridays-Sundays through Oct. 4, i.e., 5800 Cains Court, Edison; for info contact i.e.edisonwa@gmail.com.

shows are great examples of work that can only be fully appreciated in person, as the subtle physical qualities of their paintings are lost in reproduction.

Gherard's "Untitled" (2011, oil on canvas), is a melancholic pile of rock, gray on gray, located in an indeterminate space that could as easily be underwater as outside, so muted are the tones and fading the edges. What animates the picture is the artist's extreme attention to the marks of her brush, and the fresh and non-repetitive way she creates form and light with quirky and unexpected combinations of flat tones, scraped boundaries, and fading lines. Her loving dedication to the intricacies of the project humanizes the rock, giving it warmth totally at odds with its color and shape.

The modest-sized work of Cypher is even more esoteric, a world of enigmatic shapes filled with flat color and criss-crossed with line, line that is often etched into the surface and gridded, creating a sort of web into which his

biomorphic shapes are embedded. Like Gherard, Cypher gives us few clues in his titles; it is intuitive work, meant to be appreciated intuitively. "Untitled" (2013, oil on panel) appears like a sinister mask, its shape a skein of repeating lines with one "eye" blue, the other yellow. "Untitled" (2014, oil on panel), could be two red, mating amoeba, swimming in a streaky blue ground and oddly pierced with dozens of carefully drilled holes and carved-away curving lines — the work of a Dremel tool, I was told.

Other works feature forms vaguely suggestive of moon shapes, mittens, clouds and thick blue trees with legs, presented in a confident and straightforward fashion that draws us in without quite satisfying our curiosity as to what these pictures might be about. A wall of untitled ink drawings on panel are equally open-ended, like sections taken helter-skelter from larger diagrams of engineering projects or complicated machines.

Artists are increasing in number in our region, even as they are being priced out of their traditional stomping grounds downtown. Serious galleries on the periphery, like i.e., are one hopeful sign that the art scene will continue to find its way, nonetheless.

Gary Faigin is an artist, author, critic and co-founder/artistic director of the Gage Academy of Art.