

Down-to-earth abstractions from Lloyd Martin

Despite what you may have heard, most abstract art really isn't — abstract, that is.

No matter how hard artists try to push them out, real-world references inevitably creep back in. That blob of green in the corner? Definitely a tree. That patch of blue near the top? Sky, for sure. That round thing in the middle? Got to be a face.

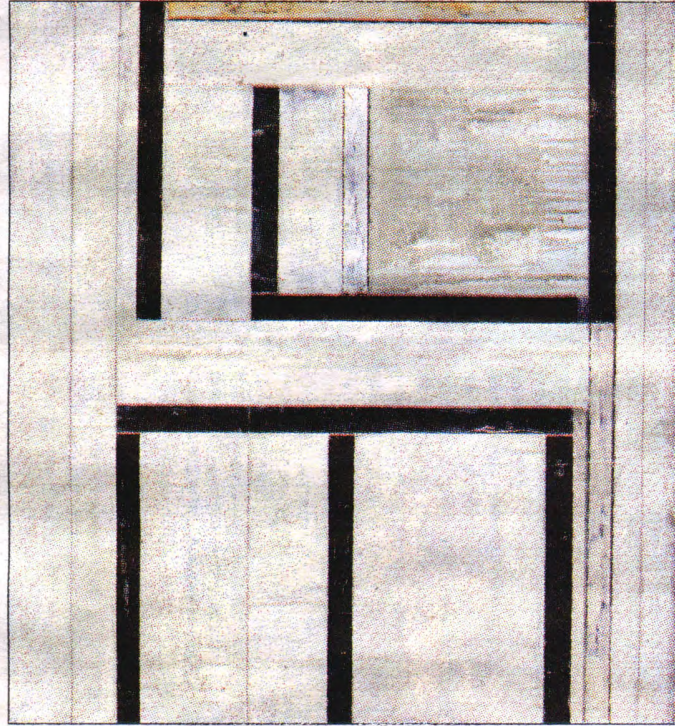
Partly, it's Mother Nature's fault. Humans, it seems, are genetically programmed to recognize familiar shapes and patterns. Perceptually speaking, we're all *Where's Waldo* fans at heart. At the same time, the need to find real-world reference points in even the most abstract art also tells us something important about the creative process. Most art, whether it ultimately winds up

being realistic or abstract or somewhere in between, is rooted in real-world events and experiences. The results may look abstract, but reality provides most of the raw material.

A good example of an abstract artist who's proud of his worldly roots is Lloyd Martin, a Pawtucket painter whose work is on display at Rhode Island College's Bannister Gallery.

A 1980 graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, Martin specializes in big geometrically patterned canvases whose dense, paint-scuffed squares and rectangles inevitably evoke architectural features such as doors, walls and windows.

Sometimes these real-world references are fairly easy to pick out. Of the seven large paintings on display at RIC, for example, two are from Martin's *Finestrae* series,



Finestrae, an oil by Lloyd Martin, is part of a show of his recent paintings at Rhode Island College's Bannister Gallery.

which takes its name from the Greek word for windows. In both cases, large black rectangles are outlined against lighter colors — deep red in one, sooty white in the other. Even without the titles to guide us, the paintings' architectural connections would be hard to miss.

Other paintings evoke larger architectural units, such as streets, buildings, subdivisions— even entire cities. In *Quay* and *Quay (2)*, the same rectangular patterns that frame the “windows” in the *Finestrae* paintings form a series of more open, step-like shapes. The results have the uneven look of an urban waterfront.

Though Martin generally keeps a low profile locally, his reputation nationally and even internationally has been growing steadily in recent years. Kudos to Bannister Gallery director James

Montford and to guest curator Lisa Russell for providing a chance to catch up with one of Rhode Island's rising art stars.

Through April 5 at the Edward Mitchell Bannister Gallery, Roberts Hall, Rhode Island College, 600 Mount Pleasant Ave., Providence. Hours: Mon.-Wed. and Fri. 11-5 and Thu. noon-9. Closed weekends. Contact: (401) 456-9765 www.ric.edu/bannister.