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serenity now

Jamie Kirkland's meditative landscapes inspire calm

By Devon Jackson

Shortly before receiving her BFA in painting from the University of Utah in 2004, Jamie Kirkland returned to Crestone, Colorado, for a month.

Snowed in, with no phone or TV, she was having no success with her still lifes; her only company was her cat and, occasionally, one of her professors, who urged her to paint “longer, deeper.” Finally, after buying two 24 x 36” canvasses (longer, deeper), Kirkland went off the artistic grid.

“That was my first experience of painting intuitively instead of observationally,” she recalls in her art studio at The Lofts, just off Cerrillos Road. “That was not the type of work I was doing at school, but it was what I was meant to do—abstract landscapes. I just didn’t have the structure for it till then.”

No structure, maybe, but she definitely had a full life. Kirkland was born in Louisiana, grew up in Alabama, and modeled in New York, where she also waited tables and occasionally took art classes at the Art Students League and the Parsons School of Design. After moving to Pensacola, Florida in 1979, she opened her own French restaurant, married, and opened a bookstore-cum-community center (similar to The Ark).

Kirkland moved to Crestone in 1979, after getting divorced, and was drawn to the Crestone Mountain Zen Center. “We had breakfast with the monks, where you were supposed to eat in silence,” she says. “It was the first time I felt like I could breathe. It felt so expansive and so different from the South.”

And more inspiring. Kirkland started taking art classes again, which led her back to school in Salt Lake City and, eventually, back to Crestone for that fateful month of painting. “After those two paintings, it felt like it was a deeper part of me coming out,” says Kirkland, an admirer of J.M.W. Turner, James Whistler, and George Inness. “I’m getting to watch something unfold in front of my very eyes. That’s more than me or my conscious mind can conjure up. It’s why anybody creates: to have that energy move through you.”

Soon Kirkland signed with Park City’s Phoenix Gallery, and with Karla Winterowd, of Santa Fe’s Winterowd Fine Art. “Sometimes, you have these people who come into your life and it’s a crossroads and you don’t even know what an important crossroads it is,” marvels Kirkland. Of Winterowd, she says, “She’s the kind of dealer Monet and Renoir had. She’s interested in my work and in me as a person.”

Kirkland moved here in 2006 and now lives in Arroyo Hondo. “Santa Fe is the best art community in the world,” she says. “And I get to see this huge expanse of sky every morning.”

Sky and ground are vital to Kirkland, as is horizon. “If it’s got sky and ground, the rest is limitless,” she says. “I’m uncomfortable if there’s no horizon—it’s got to have one. The line grounds me. It gives me a sort of fantasy to go to in my imagination.”

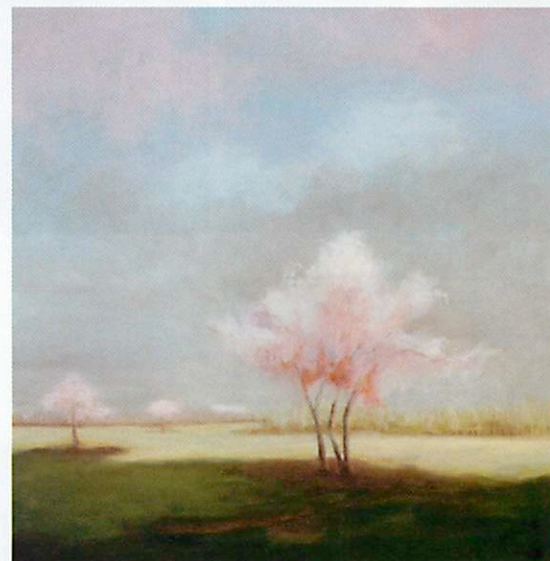
An imagination, however, based on reality. Using photographs as reference, she practically massages her oils into her canvasses, applying layer after layer. It’s an accumulation, a struggle (not that it shows), and her paintings are not finished until there’s a sense of harmony in them. “After a certain number of layers—usually four or five—something starts to happen, an otherworldly thing starts to show up.”

“My paintings are meditative; I paint from an experience of quiet,” says Kirkland. She steps back from one of her new paintings, a sky with two ethereal clouds. “I love to hear people say, It’s a very quiet painting,” she says. “People like that feeling of calm and tranquility. I try to impart that feeling more than anything.” —Devon Jackson

Jamie Kirkland: *Enchanted April*, Apr 9–22, reception Apr 9, 5–7 PM, Winterowd Fine Art, 701 Canyon, 505-992-8878, fineartsantafe.com



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Top: Jamie Kirkland in her studio; above: *Enchanted April*, oil on canvas, 40 x 40"—the wonderfully imaginative pink-leaved trees show Kirkland's current foray into a lighter palette.