

Visual art

Lush views without a point of view

Landscapes illustrate Richard Mattsson's technique and keen power of observation.

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Special to The Star

In literature, an omniscient narrator knows all but casts no judgment upon the events he reports. Thoughts and feelings are perceived and described but never become a part of the narrator's own story.

Richard Mattsson is such a narrator. The 49 paintings that compose his exhibit "Then and Now" at Leedy-Voukos Art Center eschew any one point of view in favor of sheer, disciplined, maniacal observation.

Paint trumps personal chronicle in marks that clump, clot, undulate and weave. The work, created between 1989 and 2013, is remarkably consistent in its staunch denial of ego and commitment to simply recording what the eye sees. If in the process the heart feels or the mind questions, the event is tangential, unless it triggers a physical response in the painter.

Mattsson, who retired in May after 48 years of teaching at the Kansas City Art Institute, said there is no purpose in the paintings "other than just doing them."

"They are not about anything other than what they are," he said. "I really feel that mark making is the essence of what I do. I paint because I don't have a lot of confidence in words."

And yet Mattsson also believes that "it is not possible not to express yourself." These are works of faith, acts of spirit that force the artist to arbitrarily find a location and then begin to paint, attempting to "get

lost" in stroke and reply until something unexpected occurs on the canvas.

He clarifies, "I try to keep it as close to vision and physical reaction as possible.

These images are not narrative, not a personal lexicon. They are just what was there."

In the best of Mattsson's paintings, the substance of

the oil paint itself is addressed, pared down to almost watercolor-like fluidity or spackled on with a palette knife, as in "Loose Park With Crows" (1998). This is an

ambitious and successful work with a foreground of lush green impasto marks that slap and overlap until deep space is achieved.

In "Fall Brookside" (2011),

On exhibit

"Richard Mattsson: Then and Now" continues at the Leedy-Voukos Art Center, 2012 Baltimore Ave., through Dec. 28. Hours are 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday-Saturday. For more information, call 816-474-1919 or visit leedy-voukos.com.

the forms themselves are pared down to their essence so that tree limbs are the thinnest of lines, and a stop sign is like an inscrutable red lollipop.

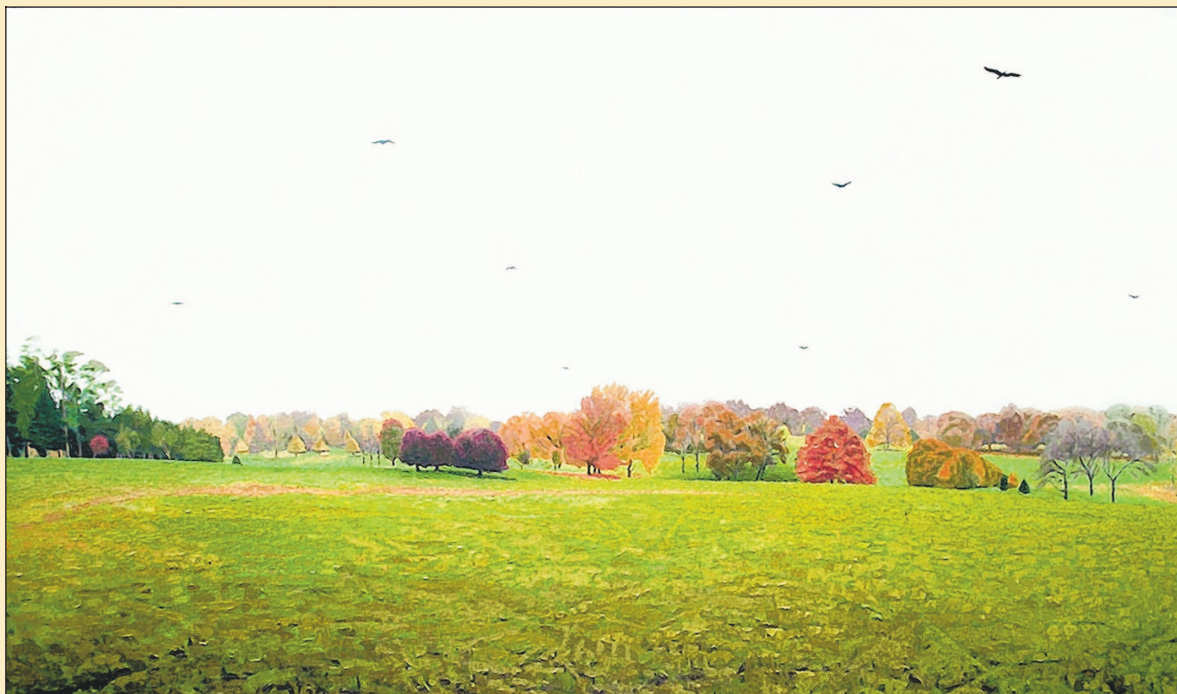
One of the drawings, "Rain and Dog Walker" (2000), depicts an urban street on a moody, gray day with one lone figure under an umbrella with a dog. The marks in this drawing are so lovely, crosshatched, zigzagging but always with a kind of heroic constraint. The artist does not ever allow his marks, and by extension his presence, to supersede or distract from his subject matter.

Mattsson is keenly aware that no painting is ever complete and that it is not really possible to eradicate self from the final product.

He believes that each viewer who gazes at the work and contemplates it completes it, just as the thoughtful interchanges between people make us who we are.

"I believe that everything that I paint is a self-portrait," he said.

These are the most honest portraits of self possible, filled with the knowledge that we are fleeting, flawed, permeable, evolving and kinetic, the myriad narratives that complete us supplied by the thoughtful contemplation of other human beings.



FROM THE ARTIST

Richard Mattsson's "Loose Park With Crows," above, "Large Cross River," below left, and "Lake Superior Blue Cabin" are part of his "Then and Now" Leedy-Voukos show of paintings.

