

# Pair of Pittsburgh-area artists draw inspiration from surroundings

By Kurt Shaw

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Vibrant mixed-media paintings by Zivi Aviraz of North Oakland are interspersed at Christine Frechard Gallery in Squirrel Hill with warm sculptures made from natural materials, such as wood and stone, by Pasquale Pristera of Churchill.

The two artists hail from different countries, but each has lived in Pittsburgh for decades. However, it is from their respective backgrounds that each artist's work has been influenced and informed.

Aviraz was born and raised in Israel. She arrived in the United States when she was sent as a temporary emissary to the Jewish Community Center in Pittsburgh more than 20 years ago. What was intended to be a three-year commitment was extended for a lifetime when she met her husband, and subsequently settled and raised a family here.



'Day Light' by Zivi Aviraz

Color and texture are central to the work of Aviraz, whose vibrantly colored mixed-media works fill the gallery as if a burst of sunshine.

"I use vibrant colors in my work because that's how I see my world," the artist says. "Being an Israeli, I am used to bright, sunny days, and living in a less sunny place brings me to use bright, sunny colors."

Whether depicting a subject or working on an abstract painting, Aviraz says she aims for viewers of her work to be able to "enter into the depths of these works with their imaginations."

"For these pieces, I began by focusing on color first," Aviraz says. "I let their boldness set the direction for the work, which then took the shape of images."

The images are all semi-abstract, drawn from daily experiences.

Both "Symphony" and "Pittsburgh" are painted in acrylic and have images of Pittsburgh collaged on, to create another layer of interest. "These were inspired by seeing and listening to the Pittsburgh Symphony," Aviraz says.

"Day Light" was painted on recycled paper and applied on a painted canvas to give depth and structure.

"I continue to explore different media and find my way by experimenting with found and recycled materials," Aviraz says.



'Pittsburgh' by Zivi Aviraz

The remaining works are more figurative in nature. "In these paintings, I found my figures to symbolize the cycle of life," she says. "I then outlined each figure to depict a different stage in life."

Aviraz's figurative pieces especially compliment the work of Pristera, whose sculptures are all figurative in nature.

For Pristera, creating sculpture is not merely drawing shape from wood or stone, it's also about making the materials "come to life."

"There is a spiritual quality to these natural materials," Pristera says. "I use the materials as inspiration, then I bring out all the emotion inherent in it. I simply try to enhance it, not transform it."

A native of Calabria, Italy, Pristera immigrated to this country at age 8. For more than a decade, he studied with Pittsburgh sculptor Jozef Stachura (1923-2001), whose Edgewood studio Pristera inherited and continues to work in.

Like Stachura, Pristera works in myriad styles, from representational to abstract, and in a variety of media, including wood, bronze and marble.

For example, a bronze work, "Flame Red," is completely abstract, yet looks every bit like what the title suggests.

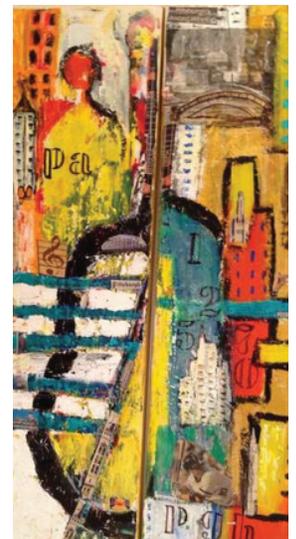
The wood sculptures are particularly intriguing, combining two-tone glazes with zippers to make it look as though the figures depicted are emerging from or wearing form-fitting clothing.

This is especially true with "Two Sided Woman," "Woman Two Tones" and "Model I," which each, at more than 2 1/2 feet tall, are rather commanding in size.

Other works, like "Ballerina," which is made of marble, illustrate the diversity of the artist's talent in working with even the most commanding of media.

Stone, one of the artist's favorite media, requires an incredible amount of patience, Pristera says.

"There is a Zen quality to the shape of any stone, to the texture and feel of it, that inspires the finished product," Pristera says. "In many of my pieces, I do not alter the stone, I touch it, I feel it, I let it speak to me; I let it tell me what it is, then I humbly ask permission to enhance its beauty, to increase its emotional and spiritual impact on any person who sees it or touches it."



'In Symphony,' by Zivi Aviraz

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