

ARTS

Meganne Rosen opens new art exhibition inspired by grieving, gardening

The paintings will be on display until early February at Obelisk Home in downtown Springfield



by Mary Ellen Chiles
December 5, 2024



Meganne Rosen says this piece was inspired by ideas like entropy and decay (Submitted photo)

You can view Meganne Rosen's latest paintings starting this weekend. But what you see is up to you.

Rosen will show “Flowers for Winter (to get us through)” beginning on Dec. 6 at **Obelisk Home on West Phelps Street** in downtown Springfield. An opening reception begins at 6 p.m. as part of First Friday Art Walk.

Grief inspires but doesn't define paintings

Rosen, a Springfield native, has had a difficult year. Her beloved uncle passed away. Her dad was diagnosed with leukemia. Two of her closest friends lost their fathers.

“I've just been really down the last year because there's been so much illness and loss in my life,” she said.

Rosen creates a showcase of paintings to show at Obelisk every one-to-two years. Her contract stipulates that she doesn't exhibit in any other gallery within 100 miles.

For this series, she didn't want to create art to illustrate suffering. She'd already lived it.

“I didn't want to make a really dark show because I didn't feel like that was super helpful,” Rosen said.

Instead of strictly turning inward, she created a series of art to engage others.

Gardening passion provides fresh perspective

Rosen and her husband, Dr. Ken Gillam, bought a 100-year-old house a couple of years ago and promptly tore up the front yard to create flower beds.

“We spend a lot of time in this garden, and it's this creative project that's really therapeutic for both of us,” Rosen said.

It grounds them, so to speak, and brings calm. They work together.

“We're a good team, because Ken will do things like research about different kinds of fertilizer for different kinds of plants, and I'm just like, ‘Look at how well these colors go together,’” Rosen said.

Still, as the temperatures drop and the leaves fall, it's hard to watch the light fade.





Some of Meganne Rosen's works are inspired by both flowers and galaxies far beyond. (Submitted photos)

“It’s always kind of sad, even though we know this is an actual cycle,” Rosen said. “We’ll have another garden next year, and a lot of things will hibernate and come back.”

But then she wondered: What if the garden didn’t die? How would it look? She had read about how nuclear radiation affects flora and fauna at Chernobyl.

“One of the things that happens with those kinds of horrible catastrophes is all the plant life eventually adapts, and it mutates to be able to survive in that condition,” she said.

So, too, do people.

“I was thinking about plants adapting to these extreme conditions, and how humans do, too,” Rosen said. “But we act like it’s less extraordinary when it’s an emotional or psychological adaption to work within really difficult, really stressful times.”

‘Painting as a verb, not a noun’

Rosen teaches art and art history full-time at Ozarks Technical Community College. She also teaches at Missouri Fine Arts Academy every summer. Her favorite movement is mid-20th century abstract expressionism, which inspires her own art.

She typically uses acrylic paint to create large, vibrant works.

“I’m always really interested in ideas like entropy, and decay, and finding beauty in catastrophe and loss,” she said. “It sounds funny when I say that to people because they’re like, ‘But you do these big, happy, abstract, bright, colorful things.’”

She doesn’t object to interpretations. Engaging with the art as the viewer is part of the work.





Meganne Rosen (Submitted photo)

“Lee Krasner talks about painting as a verb, not a noun,” Rosen said. “It’s a record of all the movement and activity by the artist.”

Rosen compares this to Roland Barthes’ literary theory called “The Death of the Author” and jokes about sounding pretentious.

“His argument is that it doesn’t really matter what the author’s intention is,” Rosen said. “It’s how the audience receives it and what the audience gets from it and brings to it.”

So, this is how she paints:

“Helen Frankenthaler is my biggest influence,” Rosen said. “She was a second wave Abstract Expressionist painter who invented soak stain painting, which is a technique I use.”

What happens next isn’t solely up to her.

“One of the things that I love about abstract painting is it’s no longer just about what the artist wants,” she said. “And to me, that’s much more interesting because it’s so open.”

For this show, she began by considering the colors and the shapes in the garden. As she painted, her mind wandered to thoughts of galaxies. Then, she began to incorporate them into her work.

“I started watching these shapes expand and change as I was making them,” Rosen said. “When I was thinking about mutations and flowers, (the art) started looking like deep space; like photographs of nebula and cosmic phenomenon.”

Playlist frees artist’s mind while painting

Rosen calls herself a control freak. She is also a process artist. So, she listens to music while she works.

“I’m kind of distracting my brain a little bit like, ‘Oh, look over here, something fun to listen to. Don’t mess with the paint so much,’” she said.

This time she decided to create a playlist of the songs she heard while creating her pieces.

“I thought it’d be cool – instead of just listening to random things – to put together a playlist that captures the mood I was feeling about these paintings,” she said.

Some of it is thematic, she said, with mentions of seasons and flowers. Other songs are about loss, or hope, or they convey a mood.

The playlist is 5 hours, so she would start it at different points.

“I wanted the mood to kind of go up and down, because it does impact the way I paint a little bit,” she said.

Slow viewing opportunity Jan. 23

The works will remain on display until early February, but the public can enjoy a slow viewing on Jan. 23 at Obelisk. Artist Shauna Le Ann Smith organizes these monthly events at the Springfield Art Museum, so while the museum is closed for renovations these events will be held elsewhere in the community.

“It’s amazing that we have Shauna in Springfield,” Rosen said.

Slow viewings are free, but space is limited. You can [sign up here](#).

Also beginning Friday, Obelisk will showcase “Sight Lines,” an exhibition of works by current Missouri State MFA students, including two of Rosen’s former pupils.



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More by Mary Ellen Chiles

