



New work by Reynolds incorporates lace from a sample book she discovered at Brimfield Fair.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 85

Imber inspired Reynolds to explore her sense of spontaneity, something that makes her different from a lot of other plein air painters, many of whom do more or less realistic portrayals of what they see before them. “He taught me that you want to be able to surprise yourself at the end,” she said. “He didn’t have a set image in his head and he never knew how the painting was going to come out.”

Reynolds has adopted a similar non-traditional method in her plein air work. She has a sense of what she wants to see happen with a piece during her initial step, which is a charcoal drawing. But

when the paints come out, any preconceived notions are tossed to the prevailing outdoor breezes. “I really never know what the final results will be and that’s how he (Imber) approached things, and I don’t think a lot of people who paint like that paint outside.”

Imber also was a major influence on Reynolds in another important way: He painted flowers.

Back then, Reynolds had no inclination to paint flowers. Instead, she would search out sweeping, far-off views and paint these huge, beautiful landscapes. When she came back after taking Imber’s class, however, instead of looking out, she started looking down at what was

immediately at hand and focusing her attention on details most people miss.

“I looked into a pond of water with these lily pads and that’s when I began taking very small sections of things and blowing them up and really thinking about the transparency of things versus the opaqueness and how I could utilize paint in that same way,” she said.

Reynolds found a new interest in the flowers she had overlooked before but, like Imber, she was not interested in just painting pretty images.

“He would paint dead flowers a lot of the time, but he painted them in such a way that you knew they were flowers but that they didn’t really describe the flower,” Reynolds said. “Once I saw how he did that, to just have the essence of the flower and record a passage of time of the flower and the leaves, I was just totally drawn to that. I figured out a way to do that in my own way and in my own language.”

Her efforts in that regard have been highly successful.

“Instead of depicting a time-anchored botanical or geographical exactitude, Reynolds works in a series of three to five sittings,” Feibel says. “She welcomes the ways that weather and the passage of days affects the plants from one sitting to the next, and often moves her viewpoint to create further change. The result is an abstraction of the garden’s colors and lines, capturing the essence of a place and its growth, bloom and decay.”

When you first look at Reynolds’ paintings, you are struck by a luminosity that seems to come from within. That intriguing effect is the result of painstaking preparation work. During the long winters, she prepares her boards for the coming spring. She builds them, then adheres paper to them before applying gesso and sanding them, over and over. “The surface is really smooth and that’s a whole part of my process because it’s almost like glass,” she said.

Reynolds had tried painting inside in winter but, because oil paint requires the use of odiferous solvents, the fumes drew complaints from her family, which includes husband Peter Reynolds and three daughters ages 19, 16 and 13. More recently, she has been doing mixed media compositions in the winter, many of which use pieces cut from a book of vintage lace samples, a treasured flea-market find.



“They’re so beautiful and rare,” she said. “Sometimes I feel guilty cutting them up.”

When the warmer weather finally arrives, she goes back outside, undaunted by the sometimes-inconvenient aspects of the natural world. “I just like being out there by myself and dealing with the elements and with bugs and dealing with heat. I find that when I’m painting none of that stuff bothers me.”

Reynolds over time has become captivated by the delicacy, symmetry and unheralded beauty of the smaller things in nature right in her own back yard, although she also returns to Maine periodically to paint with a group of Imber-inspired artists who have become good friends. “I like to take notice of the inconsequential things that most people would pass by and try to bring that to the forefront,” she said. She’s painted the view looking through leaves up at the sky, for example, or the way two plants interact with each other as they share a small corner of the garden.

“When you sit there and really look at something, you see all the variations of shape and color and all the nuances,” she said. “I like to go back and sit in the same place over and over again to see how the passage of time changes things up. I like to watch things grow and then die, just the whole life cycle of nature, and I know a lot of people don’t like painting outside, but for me it’s just mesmerizing.”

Currently, Reynolds’ work can be seen in the Baker Showroom of the Boston Design Center, 1 Design Center Place, Boston, where 15 works are on display. 📍

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