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Elise Adibi models a holistic universe in the Frick Greenhouse



Steve Mellon/Post-Gazette

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M. THOMAS ✓

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
mthomas@post-gazette.com

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When Elise Adibi installed 18 paintings for a six-month stay in the Frick Greenhouse, she expected the experience to differ from that of an exhibition within the white-walled, climate-controlled space of a museum. But some of what happened went beyond what was predicted.



The stylish glasshouse provided flowers and edibles for the Frick family from 1897 through the 1970s and is part of the campus of the The Frick Pittsburgh in Point Breeze.



Her site-specific installation, “Elise Adibi: Respiration Paintings,” occupies the two greenhouse wings, mingling abstract paintings with architectural elements designed by Ms. Adibi and flowering plants selected by the artist in collaboration with grounds manager Kim Rothert.

The north wing is a rose garden in which rose as flower, color,

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scent and idea are blended. Paintings in the south wing surround a central field of potted color that began with spring tulips and closes with fall chrysanthemums.

Floral scents rising from essence-infused paints ripened on hot, humid days, providing an additional sensory component,

While the resultant spaces are pleasurable and calming, they are layered upon a series of investigations Ms. Adibi has mulled in recent years. Two that are central are the experiential notion of change and the philosophic notion of organicism, which views everything in nature as part of an organic whole.

Ms. Adibi, 51, was born in Boston, but grew up and now lives in Squirrel Hill. She is a nationally exhibited artist who has lived and worked on both coasts. She earned degrees from Swathmore College, the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University in philosophy, architecture and fine arts, respectively.

As the exhibition nears its Oct. 22 close, the artist reflected upon what she'd learned.

The oxidation paintings, which combine urine and other agents on copper, were expected to react to the climatic exposure, and they did. (These evolved from a feminist response to Andy Warhol's oxidation paintings, but that's another story.)

"All of the oxidations changed on the first day," Ms. Adibi said. "Now all [the paintings] have changed," and that was a surprise.

"Rose Chord,' for example, was a formally structured pattern of receding and advancing geometric shapes in various shades of rose, floating on a white background. It emitted fragrances of jasmine, Australian sandalwood, bergamot, sweet orange, geranium rose and highland lavender, among others. Throughout the exhibition, it has been increasingly shaded by a colonizing dark mold.

"This painting gave a feeling of harmony and balance and connection," Ms. Adibi said. "It has a different presence now."

The surrounding plants have grown and occasionally tendrils and blossoms assert themselves into a painting's perimeter. Insects have left casings behind. If at first this dismayed Ms. Adibi, who works only in oil because of its proven permanence, she now takes it in stride.



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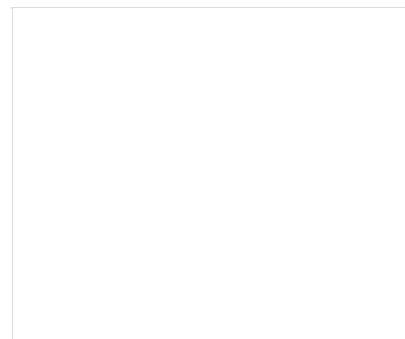
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“It opens conversations about the duration of painting, what it is to experience a painting and how do you experience their aliveness,” she said.

“Aliveness” is not a casual choice of words and hints at a larger and fascinating related concept that the artist explores handsomely in an exhibition booklet.

Under the umbrella of interconnectedness, she dissolves preconceptions, as when attributing light-bestowed vitality to the fragrances and the paintings. The distilled liquids, as a product of photosynthesis, could be seen as “a pure form of light,” she said. It’s the same force that gives life to a painting if one considers that varying light wavelengths determine one’s perception of color.

Boundaries waver in a holistic universe and open vistas wide.

“It is my belief that the plants really eat the light from the sun, and that is what supports all the life on the planet,” she said as she looked out a window at a tree.

“What a deep mystery that that creature can take sunlight and use it as a food to grow.”

The greenhouse is on the grounds of The Frick Pittsburgh, 7227 Reynolds St., Point Breeze. Two additional paintings are exhibited in The Frick Art Museum. Admission is free. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday and 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday. An exhibition booklet contains color illustrations of all works and essays by the artist, the museum’s executive director and the chief curator (\$5). Information: www.thefrickpittsburgh.org or 412-371-0600.

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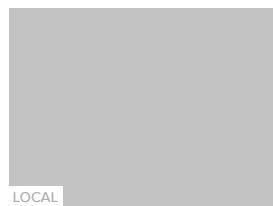


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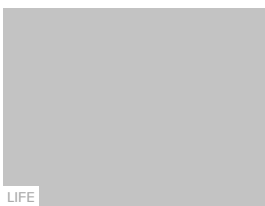
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