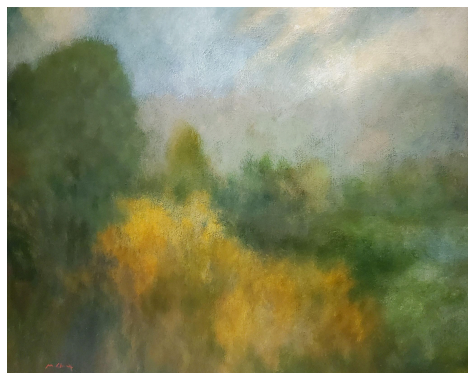


Selected Paintings from the Estate of Mark Clarke

January 29 - March 29, 2025

Also Presenting Three New Sculptures by Guest Artist Jud Turner

First Friday ArtWalk: Friday, March 7th, 5:30-7:30 pm



In the course of his sixty-year career, **Mark Clarke (1935-2016)** achieved recognition as a preeminent Pacific Northwest artist. Karin Clarke Gallery's new exhibit, *Selected Paintings from the Estate of Mark Clarke*, draws attention to his wide artistic range by showcasing three different categories of works: a splendid selection of the Oregon landscapes for which he became so well-known, several figurative pieces such as faces and farmers market scenes, and a series of abstract, experimental pieces highlighting his gift for composition. The pieces, created between 1960 and 2015, range in size from small to large and include acrylics, his favorite medium, as well as watercolors and collages. Many of the frames were built and

painted by Clarke himself. Three striking new metal sculptures by guest artist Jud Turner make a delightful addition to the show.

Clarke lived his whole life in the Willamette Valley and was passionately attuned to its contours and to the subtlety of its shifting moods. Indeed, mood is very much what his landscape paintings are about. Clarke uniquely excelled at conveying the atmospheric quality of the air and light at a specific moment, or the nuances of a given season: ochres, greens and russets gently overlapping as summer transitions to fall; the vibrancy of fall foliage against a blue-gray sky reflected in water; a brooding sky before a storm. In these works, the painter favored a limited palette of muted earthtones, illuminated at times with bursts of intense color. Contours are blurred, as if viewed through a haze that softens edges and forms. Details are vague or omitted altogether. Clarke wryly called these landscapes "myopic." There is tremendous power in so much understatement. Despite the absence of specific references to any particular locations, we recognize in these landscapes an emotional, sensory, and aesthetic accuracy, which transcends mere visual perception.

Even the more melancholy of Clarke's landscapes retain a luminous quality. Clarke developed his own method of applying and layering paint, which lends his acrylics the texture and subtlety of oil. While he often started his overall composition on site, most of the work was done later in the studio. Using any tools at his disposal, he would apply successive layers of paint, not only glazing between each of these, but also scraping, wiping, scumbling, thereby partially exposing previous layers and generating a rich and lustrous surface. *Tourrettes-sur-Loup*, an early watercolor that bears the influence of David McCosh, shows how much Clarke's style and technique evolved over time. What never changed was the primacy of the integrity of the finished work as a self-sufficient art object.

Several of Clarke's landscapes pursue a different formal purpose: they are powerful studies in abstraction, with their picture plane divided into horizontal layers of elemental landscape shapes and color areas that range, depending on the work, from fiery orange with dark greens and blacks to delicate pastel hues. But it was his abstract collage practice that gave Clarke a limitless opportunity to play with the dynamic organization of formal components. The use of hand-painted strips of rice paper allowed him to experiment with color and shape relationships as well as texture. This, says Margaret Coe, ties with his sculpture: "He had a keen sense of abstract shapes, a talent for putting forms together in an interesting way."

This same skill is also at work in some of Clarke's figurative works. *Still Life with Mannequin and Paper*

Flowers, with its bold colors, flat color areas, and decorative elements reminiscent of Matisse, is all about composition: a complex pattern of shapes, colors, and lines whose dynamic interaction keeps the viewer's gaze actively moving through the picture plane. The same can be said about the two farmers market scenes, especially *Farmers Market #3*, with its emphasis on the geometrical division of space through vertical and diagonal lines, its pattern of triangular and rectangular shapes, and its use of shared borders, shapes within shapes, and complementary colors. Composition was always at the heart of Clarke's investigation, and it informed how he took in the world around him.

Clarke grew up in Junction City and started painting on his own early on. While enrolled at Oregon State University, he met painter Nelson Sandgren who became a lifelong friend. He soon transferred to the University of Oregon, where he earned a B.S. in 1959 and, after two years in the Army, an MFA degree in 1965. It was then that he met his lifelong partner, Margaret Coe, who would also become a major Northwest artist. His teachers, Andrew Vincent, Jan Zach, and especially David McCosh, initially contributed to his artistic vision and approach, which he then developed into something uniquely his own, just as he evolved his very own expressive technique. Clarke was hired by the UO Museum of Art as a curator and chief preparator while still a graduate student, a position he held until 1975, when he became a full-time painter while also teaching at the University of Oregon. He returned to the Museum of Art in 1983 as a museum technician, until his retirement in 1995. He never ceased to paint until his death, shortly after his 80th birthday. His work has been included in numerous public and private collections. In 2017-2018, he and his wife, painter Margaret Coe, were honored at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art with a retrospective exhibit accompanied with a fully illustrated catalogue. Clarke is remembered as an outstanding artist, all at once gifted painter, sculptor, and master craftsman.

Jud Turner mostly sculpts animals, which he creates out of welded steel and recycled metal objects, some of which are used as found, others cut and re-welded. Each creation is given a name. *Avila*, a giant dragonfly poised on a half crescent stand, is an arresting combination of fabricated steel and a few found objects, such as crystal doorknobs for the eyes and typewriter keys for its feet and legs. Turner succeeds in translating into steel the diaphanous texture of the insect's wings. There is no prettifying or anthropomorphizing. The uncanny, singular, beauty of the dragonfly is represented in a way that may prompt us to ponder our relationship, aesthetic and otherwise, to the insect world.

Rabscuttle and *Pipkin*, the two life-size rabbits, are named after characters in *Watership Down* and endowed with a corresponding individuality. Both are caught mid-motion, presumably fleeing, one in a long, elegant hop, the other racing with fierce intent. Both are created out of "old gears from motorcycle engines, old bike fenders, kitchen spoons, horseshoes, whatever it takes to create the shape that captures the anatomy of a rabbit."

Turner, who, incidentally, has six adopted rabbits and a pig, labels this stylized realism. "Animals are a launching point for things that I want to play with, forms that I want to exaggerate," he says. He also finds "making cold, old, static steel look like living, warm, moving form an interesting challenge to work with for an artist."

Born in Eugene, Turner studied drawing and painting at the University of Oregon under painters Frank Okada and Ron Graff before turning to sculpture. He has been focusing on welded steel and assemblages of found metal objects for more than two decades. Three of his monumental public pieces, two herons and a triceratops, are located in Eugene. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and is to be found in numerous public and private collections across the country.

- Sylvie Pederson