

## Dynamic colors electrify Segrest's abstracts

by M. Jackson Brister

Jane Gillis Segrest is an artist, a woman, a southerner. Through the years, these singularities have fused to produce a powerful body of work. Perceptions rooted in childhood and the joy of discovery resonate in her rich and complex paintings. Her goal is to stop the viewer, to elicit emotion—and stop them she does. The signature treatment of color, characteristic in all her paintings, produces dynamic works exemplified in *New Beginnings*. *New Beginnings* presents airy, translucent colors that explode in brilliant concentrations. “My color theory is to use all of them. I love color. I have never met a color I didn’t like. There are rules to learn, but I never assume the rules are the only way to see something,” she says.

A successful artist trained in realism, she has been painting professionally since 1980. Segrest’s work, water-based mediums and oils, appears in private and corporate collections. Her formal training and willingness to experiment result in paintings that communicate a sense of the exotic, yet familiar. Her work surpasses conventional interpretations of the South to celebrate the individuality of the progressive southern spirit. Viewers are compelled to see things differently. Through the use of arbitrary shapes and luminous colors, ordinary subjects find new definition. Segrest’s larger-than-life treatments explore form and detail. The precise colors of *Paradise* are perfectly executed, but these are not your mama’s flowers. Segrest bends the rules. The juxtaposition of unexpected lines and a recognizable flower creates a surprising unity between flower and foliage.

Mary Ola R. Miller, owner of The Gallery of Art in Panama City, Florida, is a longtime patron of the arts. She has witnessed the continued growth of Segrest, “The Gallery of Art has shown Jane Gillis Segrest’s work for a number of years. Her style has changed and expanded. She goes from watercolors into oils, from realism to the abstract; her paintings show the depth and intensity of her feeling for fine art. She has grown from a beginning artist to an artist of great stature.”

When does a young artist find her voice, know her calling? Segrest does not remember a defining moment when she knew with certainty that she would pursue art. The desire to be an artist grew from a series of connections, including the posting of her fourth grade Halloween drawing on the bulletin board. The power and possibilities of color were discovered with a tube of red lipstick; she refers to this as her “first color moment.” Her love of flowers would manifest itself repeatedly in her artistic pursuits. “My early interest in flowers and flower arranging keeps calling me back to create more of them. Flowers are still a source of inspiration for my work and can be seen in my abstract work.”

Growing up in Hartford, Alabama, amid the backdrop of magnolias and a comfortable southern lifestyle was magical. Creativity was a way of doing things, of living, and was practiced by women who were artistic in their daily tasks and lives. Summer afternoons were spent on the porch, sipping Coca-Colas® and listening to her mother and friends talk as they worked on their hand sewing. “It seemed like the whole town was nurturing. Many times when I am working on a project, I am drawn back to memories of people I knew and the things they did. These things have influenced my life and my way of seeing,” Segrest says.

Her first art class was at the University of Montevallo. Eventually she moved to Panama City, Florida, where her days were filled with raising her family and community activities. Contact with artists fueled her desire to explore her own creativity. When her children started school, she realized she could pursue her interest in art.

She spent several years mastering the basics before she began to experiment. Segrest believes in the importance of traditional training and continued learning. “The only way to grow in your art is to have a strong sense of focus and a methodical program of practice, study and development. Drawing is important; it trains the eye see form and detail.”

Painting is an intuitive process for Segrest. She admits to becoming lost in the moment, and the moment becomes hours. Excitement is how she describes her state of mind while she paints. Her satisfaction comes from the process of painting as much as the completed work. “Painting abstract

work, I feel I accomplish something innovative, not something that has been done over again as a realistic copy. With realistic work, people feel things are the way they should be, because that is the way they are. Abstract art is an opportunity to go beyond the obvious and look for innovative ways to express things. You cannot look at abstract art without thinking.”

*Significant Message* draws the viewer into pattern and movement. A sense of recognition is reinforced by the strong strokes reminiscent of Chinese characters placed against a vibrant tapestry. The fluid movement and sensual treatment of the subject matter in *Ode to Georgia O’* is suggestive of a Georgia O’Keefe painting, hence the title. *Bahama Mama* is one her few works that features a person. The austere life reflected in *Bahama Mama’s* face is a heartrending contrast to the subject’s decorative garb and the tropical ambience.

Segrest cannot stop looking, thinking and studying. Everything is a work of art with many interpretations. She moves from the abstract to the non-objective with ease. Her range is impressive; contrast the non-objective *Land Plan Series* and the abstractions of the *Diva Series*. The dense colors, bold strokes and geometric patterns of *Land Plan Series* were inspired by aerial topography. The *Divas* are quintessentially female, angels whose gowns have the requisite pocket for the multitasked. The diverse, sometimes whimsical abstractions are delivered in a pure, almost primitive style. A luminous *Diva* seems to be in motion while another *Diva* painted in muted hues, appears contemplative.

*Flight of Blue Bird* is representative of Segrest as an evolving artist. Primary colors of yellow and blue are delivered with an ease that is disarming, complicated and satisfying. Segrest’s adept use of color is evident in the *Floats Series*. One can almost hear the ocean, but there is more. The painting’s colors conjure days past, resident childhood memories. Segrest’s work is provocative and joyous. In her hands, even the most common subject becomes new.

Her work has won numerous awards in many national art exhibitions. As a working artist, Segrest is never static. She travels and continues to nationally exhibit her work. “I have shipping crates that have been more places than I have. I tell people that I just like hanging around.”

An extensive collection of her abstract work was commissioned in 2000 and is displayed at Gulf Coast Community Hospital in Panama City, Florida. Two other commissioned works are showcased at the Panama City International Airport. The Wiregrass Museum of Art in Dothan includes one of her abstracts in their permanent collection. She has participated in many regional and national juried exhibitions, numerous solo exhibitions and two museum showings.

Segrest resides in Bonifay, Florida where she maintains a consistent painting schedule. For more information or to schedule an appointment, contact the artist at 850-547-3741.