

New Show of Portraits Mixes Softness of Beauty with Edge of Reality

by Tamara Neely



Whitehorse artist Suzanne Paleczny's new show of portraits is on exhibit at the Rah Rah Gallery until Jan. 2. Shown here are "Binti", left, and "Karen," which are both oil paintings on canvas.

PHOTO: Tamara Neely

There's a feeling of gentleness and raw humanity to Whitehorse artist Suzanne Paleczny's portraits, which is an amazing thing considering they are, at their base level, "blobs of colour" on a flat surface.

Paleczny's show of new portraits, on exhibit at the Rah Rah Gallery in Whitehorse until Jan. 2, are oils on canvas – 2.5 feet high and 3.3 feet wide.

Using broad strokes of colour mixed with fine detail, Paleczny is able to convey both a softness to her portraits and the edginess of real people.

large scale. In this show she focuses in on subject's faces, but in the past she has painted full-body portraits on very large canvases.

"I like working on a large scale," she says. "When you look at the paintings they (the brush strokes) are loose. If you get close, it's like blobs of colour, but when you step back the image becomes apparent."

Another reason Paleczny likes working with a large canvas is it shows the subject in a way we don't usually see it - one of the things that art can do.

"When you change the scale of [the portrait], people see it in

a way that's different than when they see faces of people passing them walking down the street," she says. "It's like people who paint landscapes, you might say, 'Oh, I never noticed there is purple in the shadows.' So I think art is meant to make you see more than you would normally see - or in a different way than you'd normally see it."

One of the things that Paleczny's portraits do is show the beauty of everyday people. Consider her portrait of a man who's been in frigid weather long enough to have frost formed on his mustache and beard. The guy is alive. And that sense of life is a feeling that comes through in all seven portraits featured in the show.

Another who has spread a mud mask on her face. When Paleczny saw her daughter with the mask, it made them laugh, which cracked the mask along her natural facial lines.

"You can see where her wrinkles will eventually be," Paleczny

says. "I'm drawn to things like contrast... and with this painting there is the contrast between young and old, beauty and ugly."

She has used a wide palette of colours to evoke the softness of her daughter's young skin and the dry texture of the mud mask. These colours have a rich depth, which Paleczny says is partly due to starting with a black canvas. She coats each canvas in black gesso before applying the oils.

"I do this partly because I don't like any bits of the canvas to show through, rather it'll be little black specs and you can use that to make tone," she says. "And it just looks better, the colour is deeper. It gives more depth to the colour."

Suzanne Paleczny's portraits range in price from \$1,800 to \$2,900 and are showing at The Rah Rah Gallery until Jan. 2. Gallery hours are Tuesday to Friday from 1 p.m. until 6 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. until 6 p.m. The gallery is located at 6159 - 6th Avenue in Whitehorse.

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See Page 9

Events

Jickling's Jabberjings	2
Portrait Show	3
Didee & Dideo	5
A Klondike Korner	5
Fiddling Around	6
Ruffin' It	8
Mitrouillette	10
Christmas Cookies	11
Bombay Fridays	12
Northern Opry	14
Bridging Cultures	15
Take it In Stride	20
Eating Alive	21
Archery to Zumba	23

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