



'February, Farren Road'

Sullivan Goss photos



'February Storm'



'Pine Sentinel'

Land and Sea, and the Twain Thereof

SANTA BARBARAN LANDSCAPE PAINTER, NICOLE STRASBURG, BROACHES MATTERS BOTH LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE WITH HER NEW SHOW, 'NEW TERRAIN.'

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



Nicole Strasburg, 'New Terrain'

When: through December 1

Where: Sullivan Goss, 7 E. Anapamu St.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., seven days a week

Information: 730-1460, sullivan-goss.com



'Murder at Twilight'

With the latest showing of work by Nicole Strasburg, one of the more compelling of Santa Barbara's many landscape/nature painters working and showing in our midst, the artist taps into the proverbial literal-meets-figurative meaning zone with a show titled "New Terrain." Her new show at Sullivan Goss includes imagery we may recognize from her perspective on seascapes and shore sightings, done up in her special, spare-stylistic way. Her earlier show in the gallery focused on paintings from the discrete, offshore microcosm of the Channel Islands.

But these are deliberately stirred in – and stirred up – with a certain drier "new terrain," in the form of central Californian, back-country views from a new terrain of a new inland property near Bakersfield. New views and atmospheres have inspired new, painterly ideas.

In a way, Ms. Strasburg's new show is an ode to the remarkable diversity of life and land and sea in the state of California. Yet it's something more internal, as well. Ms. Strasburg, who possesses that coveted, personalized handle on how best to pay respects to beloved, natural scenery while asserting her own voice as a painter who loves the sea, and pine trees, as well.

Somehow, her current Sullivan Goss show works in singular and double and otherwise multiple-image ways. In "Pure Sentinel," she pays homage to a pine tree in an odd, upward-tilted view, taking on the upper part of a tree enfolded into a not-unimportant cloudscape above it. But, for grounding and bearings, that painting hangs next to two linked, horizontal paintings of tree-lined turf, "Along the Greenbelt."

A starker set of paired images, "Bare Limbs," is strategically placed next to "Early Spring," a sighting of a tree-bound bluebird, saved from sentimental bird picture kitsch through the painter's spare brushwork and slightly cool prevailing painterly head.

This show's most dramatic, and fairly hypnotic, example of mix-

and-match plurality of vision is arranged, mosaic-like, on one wall, with 36 12" by 12" square canvases, freely combining and intentionally interspersing her views of mountains and shore. The sum effect is a composite portrait from more than one perspective of California, but which doesn't get caught-up in either the minutiae or the grand sweep, the forest or the trees, or the waves or the clouds.

Multiples and contrasting, commingling paintings can be found elsewhere in the show. Three small, stacked horizontal paintings – "Rain Over the Valley," "Receding Storm" and "February, Farren Road" – supply a harmonious mix of vantage points, broadening the sense of landscape and weather effects. Meanwhile, back at the Pacific Ocean, her four-panel piece, "February Storm – Quadrych" is a lyrical and lean vision, a study in shades of blue and white, with impressions of nature's water cycle, in poetic terms.

Other strong paintings in this intriguing exhibition include the slyly titled, "Murder at Twilight," the "murder" being a clutch of crows, strategically dotting and rhythmically punctuating the compositional space. The affecting mood piece, "Passing Summer Storm" is another Strasburg painting with a semi-deceptive personality, at once faithfully detailing what there is to be seen in nature, while also injecting the painter's own unique, interpretive spin and way with paint.

As a point of comparative and artistically evolutionary reference, the gallery visitor can drift into the back room of the deep, three-part gallery space to the fine and willfully misty-eyed group show, "Tonalism Now." There, in what is actually a "then" scenario for the painter, we find a painting by Ms. Strasburg from 2003, "Tideline." This decade-old painting was made during a more abstractionist-inclined point in her work (or at least her publicly displayed work), providing an insight to her evolving sense of how to make paintings, and interesting contrast to her newer ideas in paint, and her newer terrains.