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A fall exhibition of new work by Columbia artist Bonnie Goldberg – capturing the spirit and physical grace of the female figure through abstraction, color and design – opened last week at Newberry College, Wessel Gallery.

Entitled “Musings: Reflections on Line and Color,” the show of mostly large pieces created in many mediums follows Goldberg’s new direction. “I am saying more now with color and with less line and design,” she explained.

Without the opportunity to compare pieces in this current body of work to her earlier work, that point might be lost on new patrons, just being introduced to her style and visual goals.

“With each piece, I draw and paint with one voice that speaks as a whole. That voice is created by lines weaving in and out of the color forms,” Goldberg said.

Innate in each of her figurative pieces is her admiration for women and their inner strength.

Goldberg, continues to enjoy acclaim for her gestural brushstrokes through which she captures subjects’ inner selves – often with attitude coming through as a colorful stroke – making it a key element of each painting.

The artist is primarily self-taught, with direction and encouragement received at the elbow of some revered artists. Creativity and technique flow from her pencils and brushes, bringing to her surfaces subliminal messages.

An internal eye allows Goldberg this extra dimension – of “seeing” beneath a subject’s skin. “I don’t know where it comes from, but I recognize that I have this gift,” Goldberg acknowledged. She coaxes it to the plane of her canvases and paper in ways she has learned over decades of painting from life.

In an attempt to describe her indelible process, Goldberg says: “I take out the detail and try to capture – in the smallest lines – the spirit of the movement. That’s what I try to achieve as I draw; that’s what I feel the pose is about. From the subject’s gesture, I try to translate the essence of who she is – in that moment in time,” Goldberg said.

With only minimal marks on her canvas, and with what appears – to the untrained eye – as swashes of paint, Goldberg somehow fully introduces her subjects to the viewer, still leaving much to the viewer’s personal interpretation.

“I believe it is important to include the viewer in a work of art. I see a portrait as a collaboration engaging the subject or model, the artist, and also the viewer,” Goldberg said.

Because Goldberg's work takes her to the figure as it moves in space, the painter breathes in what the subject responds to "and, at the same time, I immerse myself in her gestures. That is what is important to me in my work – the gesture of her."

Once the painter is satisfied she "has" the subject, the artist and subject settle into shared decisions: a comfortable pose – and what music will play softly in the background. "The subject chooses both." Goldberg's intuitions about her subject come into sharper focus as those choices are made.

"It seems that subjects respond to music, just as I do. To me, music is the ultimate art. When someone creates something ethereal like that, it informs and feeds the art, pushes it out. I know my work is shaped by music – or is it the other way around?" Goldberg wondered.

"When I am working alone in the studio, I choose music that matches how I am feeling on that day. Although my musical tastes are very eclectic, I sometimes play one song that I love over and over again, and my response to what's playing comes through in the painting I'm working on at the time."

Goldberg expects the same synergy, times three, when the subject chooses music for the painting session. "When a subject arrived for a recent session, I had on Billie Holiday. I had her turned down so low you could barely hear her, but the energy from her voice was palpable." Goldberg senses that music "focuses my work and motion from a different part of my brain."

In recent years music that feeds her art also has touched her heart – especially when a ballad or some other love song comes up on the play list. "Since my first granddaughter Olivia was born, I have found that a lot of music I listen to makes me think of her. I was not prepared for this new form of love that I feel for her, and now her little sister as well."

When the first little girl arrived, a friend told Goldberg having a grandbaby is like having a love affair. "I agree with her. It is so satisfying to be in this place in my life that I can give myself over to adoring these children and creating this art."

For Goldberg, art and love are inseparable. "As artists and as lovers of art, we understand that it is art that teaches us what is important in life and defines those moments we all have when beauty becomes reality."

Besides Wessel's Gallery, where "Musings" will remain on view through November, more of Goldberg's work can be seen in Columbia at her studio in the Historic Arcade Building on Main Street, at Anne Neilson Fine Art Gallery in Charlotte, N.C., and also at [www.bonniegoldberg.com](http://www.bonniegoldberg.com)

