

VISUAL ART REVIEW

What about our nests?

Painter Carol MacDonald at the Mist Grill Gallery

The Mist Grill, 92 Stowe St. in Waterbury, is exhibiting "What About Our Nests?" paintings, prints and mixed-media by Colchester artist by Carol E.S. MacDonald, through Oct. 16. The gallery is open restaurant hours: Monday-Sunday, 6:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and Thursday-Sunday, 5:30 to 9 p.m.; for more information, call 244-2233.

By Sarah Seidman

TIMES ARGUS ART CRITIC

Tranquility isn't a word in painter Carol E.S. MacDonald's lexicon at the moment. Her tempestuous paintings, prints and mixed-media works, up at the Mist Grill Gallery in Waterbury through Oct. 16, are full of ominous black birds and the disconcerting circuitry of mazes. Though the paintings are often gentle in color, with rusty reds, deep golds and pale greens predominating, almost every one is shadowed by alarm or anxiety in the form of a hovering avian messenger. In a show pointedly titled "What About Our Nests?" there is not a single nest visible, no place of rest for the birds nor for the viewer caught in the visual swirl of the labyrinth.

Two works stand out in design and execution. The first, "Two Birds Walking," is a long horizontal piece, with a thick scabby band of rusty clay and brushstrokes that emphasize the underlying bumps and scrapings of darker color. Above this base is a band of green ascending gently from right to left, and on top a third layer of lighter rusty orange. Near the right corner are two small black birds, wings folded, near the green slope. It's a beautiful picture but a very lonely one, with the creatures of the air grounded and confounded by the emptiness of their terrain.

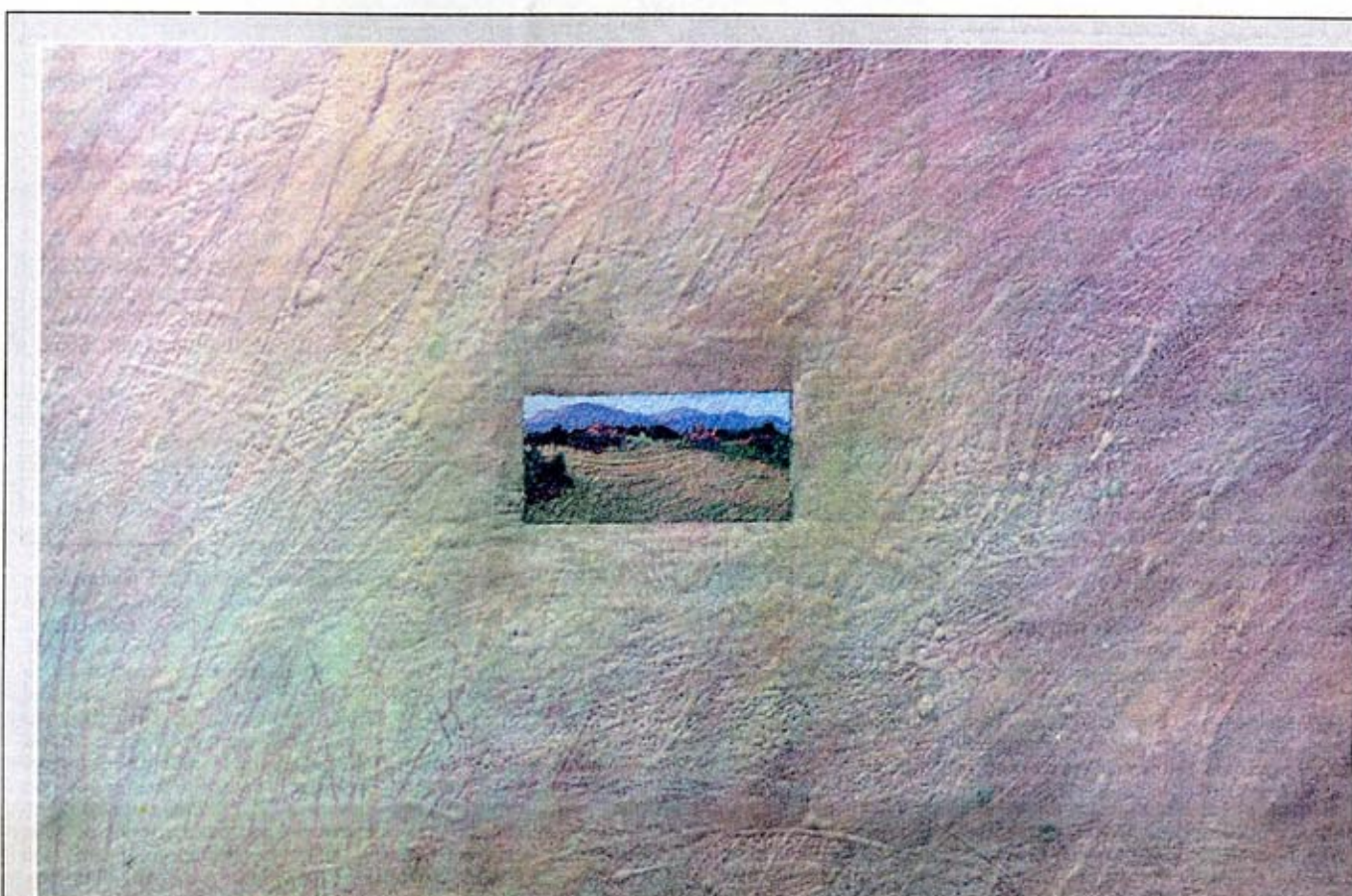
The second, "In the Landscape," another long

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horizontal canvas, drips thick streaks of paint or glue almost vertically to make a streaming, living landscape of pale green and dark gold grasses. The texture creates a wonderful sense of motion and liquidity, and thus heightens the perilous feeling of a tiny rectangular painting caught in the center of the maelstrom. The small rectangle holds a familiar pastoral view of mountains, fields and trees - it's still intact, but surrounded and almost overwhelmed by the thick changeable exterior.

MacDonald inspects this worried feeling of hers from all angles and in various media, like a crow uncovering a particularly juicy bit of carrion. In the big vertical "Shifting Perspective," she puts the two birds in a narrow sky over a massive earth, with a larger central bird and its shadow gliding across the dirt and tendrils of green. "Five Birds Feeding" takes an aerial view, looking down on black patches caught in dappled shades of orange and green. In "Labyrinth I" the birds circle a green field with a central maze; in "Labyrinth III" the maze is even more stylized inside a box, with black birds marching like sentinels around the perimeter of the square. The print "Flocking" comes closest to hopefulness, with its band of black birds rising into a blue sky, some heavy and black but others soft and semi-transparent.

Some of the smaller pieces in the show seem merely ornamental while several of the largest paintings are blunt to the point of unpleasantness, but however awkwardly realized, all emphasize the sense of foreboding MacDonald intends. A Colchester mother of two who grew up outside New York City and first came to Vermont in 1975, she is a longtime opponent of plans for a circumferential highway in her neighborhood, and 50 percent of all sales from this exhibit will go to the



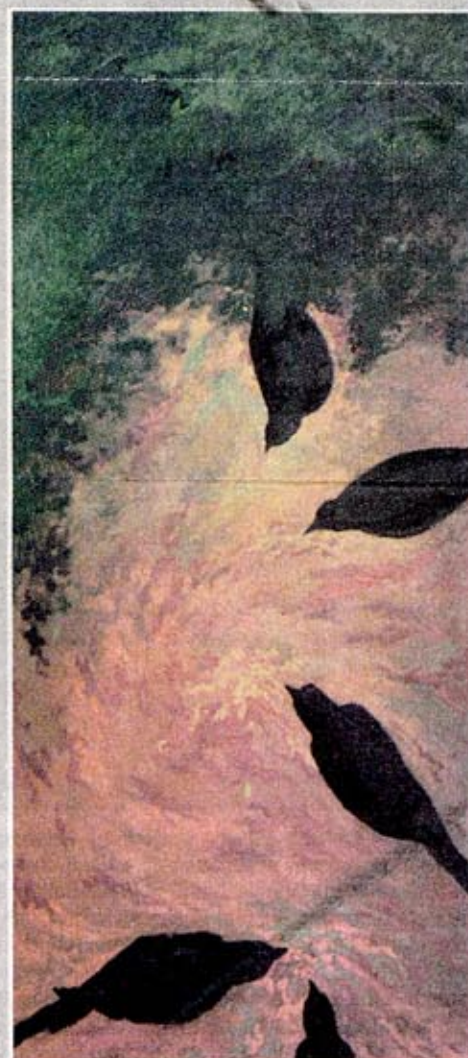
"In the Landscape"

Sandy Macys/Times Argus



"Labyrinth I"

Sandy Macys/Times Argus



"Five Crows Feeding"

Sandy Macys/Times Argus

conservation efforts of the Vermont chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

MacDonald is also a survivor of sexual abuse, and these pieces, like her earlier work, refer to that trauma in their almost-constant feeling of being on edge, and a little afraid. It's a heightened sensibility, an animal-like alertness to the danger of bodily harm, and though she calls her seven-

circuit labyrinths, derived from the Hopi Indian culture, "sacred space", they are also scared space, where someone can be enclosed without an obvious exit. She points out in her artist's statement that crows or ravens are messengers but also scavengers, who clean the earth by eating garbage. The identification with these birds may refer to her work as an artist (a messenger from

beyond the ordinary world) and as a leader of support groups where injured women must uncover the buried refuse of their past in order to heal and grow.

Like the raucous caw of a crow, this exhibit is clearly intended as MacDonald's warning cry alerting others to the dangers of unobstructed growth.