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Lissa Bockrath didn't know what she wanted to paint for her current exhibit — even as the 1990 St. Paul High School graduate was painting.

For her new showcase of work, Bockrath employed a method called stream of consciousness. She simply let the paint inspire her direction.

"It was a bit daunting to approach an empty canvas and just start applying paint without knowing what image I was going to create," said Bockrath, the wife of Cleveland Indians General Manager Mark Shapiro.

It was exciting for the suburban Cleveland woman to see the images transform from abstract brush strokes to loose, "gestural" landscapes.

"In fact, when I started this work I assumed they were going to be primarily abstract images," Bockrath said. "Yet as they evolved, they became obviously nature inspired."

The new exhibit, called "Dissolving Nature," opens Friday at the Wooltex Gallery in downtown Cleveland.

For the show, Bockrath abandoned the mixed media of oil on photograph and returned to oil on canvas.

“I feel as an artist you always have to challenge yourself,” she said. “I felt it was important to push my comfort zone and explore a new direction. It’s that thrill of discovery that keeps me excited about the next piece.”

For the past 12 years, Bockrath has been using the medium of oil on photographs.

It started by accident. At first, she would take photographs as references for her paintings and paint on them to get an idea for the color and composition. After a while, she realized the altered photos were more compelling than the paintings on which she’d been working.

“I loved working on the photograph,” Bockrath said. “It gave me incredible depth and a rich surface to begin my work on.”

Bockrath’s interest in art began as a child, when she’d produce artwork out of household items.

One of her only memories of kindergarten was the first day she and her fellow pupils were allowed to paint. The teacher gave her three jars of primary color and a large piece of paper.

“I was so excited I couldn’t stop painting,” Bockrath recalled. “By the end of the day all the layers of color blended together and it just looked like a big brown blob.”

Bockrath said that didn’t discourage her. In fact, she couldn’t wait to paint more.

As she got older, Bockrath decided she didn’t want to pursue art as a profession; she felt she couldn’t support herself on her art.

She tried to take a typing class her junior year in high school, didn’t get in and reluctantly took an art class instead.

Bockrath fell in love with the discipline the first day.

“Fortunately I had an amazing art teacher, Joanne Clarke, who helped nurture my talents,” Bockrath said.

Today, Bockrath boasts an impressive resume; she’s been featured in numerous exhibits, affiliated with a number of galleries and received many honors.

“Dissolving Nature” opens at 5:30 p.m. Friday at the Wooltex Gallery, 1900 Superior Ave., Cleveland. It runs through Jan. 18. For more information, visit www.thewooltexgallery.com [2].

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