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As artist Lissa Bockrath's life changes, so does imagery of her work

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Moving from Cleveland's gritty urban landscape to the winding roads and dramatic terrain of Chagrin Falls would probably transform just about anyone. For area artist Lissa Bockrath, the change is most evident in her paintings' imagery, which, over the course of a few years, has evolved from city scenes to vivid abstractions of natural settings.

A 1995 graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Art, Bockrath made a name for herself in the local gallery scene with her distinctive approach of painting in oils over photographs of Cleveland. For more than eight years, she ran the Bockrath Gallery in Cleveland's Little Italy neighborhood, holding annual solo shows of her own work and spotlighting dozens of other local artists.

In the past decade, Bockrath also has exhibited at galleries across the county, from New York to San Francisco. Now, after a three-year hiatus from the local gallery scene, Bockrath has returned with a major solo show titled "Dissolving Nature," on view at the Wooltex Gallery in Cleveland through Friday, Jan. 18.

The show of 36 paintings is an unveiling of sorts, introducing Bockrath's new work to Northeast Ohio. It marks a major shift in her approach to painting. Most notably, she is no longer painting over photographs; the new works are all oil on canvas.

Letting go of the photograph as a base for her paintings has liberated Bockrath in significant ways. First, her imagery, which is now nature-based, is freer and more abstract. But even more pronounced is her handling of paint, which is looser and bolder than ever before.

Interestingly, the new paintings are in some ways more believably real than those Bockrath made over photographs. Many of them depict dramatically illuminated landscapes with moody skies reminiscent of sunsets. Others suggest water gushing over craggy rock formations, most likely inspired by the picturesque scenery of Chagrin Falls.

Up close, Bockrath's latest canvases demonstrate a newly confident and diverse way of handling paint as well, with a wide array of heavy and fine brushstrokes and more fluid areas that occasionally become drippy. These qualities give her work a refreshing vitality that was at times lacking before.

In several works in the show, such as "Ebb and Flow" and "Spontaneous Outburst," bold brushwork and abrupt color shifts are used to create images in which the distinctive character of the paint, in a sense, becomes the subject of the work. Whether or not landscape imagery served as inspiration for these paintings, they move into exciting new territory for Bockrath: pure abstraction.

For many artists, extreme personal changes prompt equally extreme shifts in their artistic output. Although life changes don't always lead to major artistic breakthroughs, for Bockrath, they clearly have.

Wooltex Gallery is located in the Tower Press Building, 1900 Superior Ave.

Tranberg is an artist and writer living in Cleveland. Art Matters is a column that runs weekly in Friday covering the area art scene. To be considered for publication, items about shows or



DAN TRANBERG

SCENIC BYWAYS: After a three-year hiatus from the local gallery scene, area painter Lissa Bockrath returns with a major solo exhibition, "Dissolving Nature," on view at Cleveland's Wooltex Gallery through Friday, Jan. 18.

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