

Artist shows abstract acrylics

Catharine Carter has her first full exhibit of abstract acrylics, *Changed Particles*, on display at Bill Hester Fine Art in Chapel Hill. Carter also has a series of black and white photo portraits, "Town Treasures," on display at the Chapel Hill Museum.

By Rebecca Bailey : The Herald-Sun chh@heraldsun.com Oct 3, 2008 CHAPEL HILL -- Light is at the charged core of Catharine Carter's art.



Most locals are familiar with Carter's award-winning photography. The former UNC art major has recorded her hometown's significant people and places since 1975. The Chapel Hill Museum recently opened her latest series of black and white portraits, "Town Treasures," honoring 12 senior citizens who have helped shape the area's history.

But while maintaining her basement darkroom, Carter has quietly balanced her artistic life with a small attic studio where she has always been, she said, "a closet painter."

Hidden no longer. Her first full exhibit of abstract acrylics at Bill Hester Fine Art brings Carter's work into the light that fueled each canvas. "Charged Particles: The Edge of Infinity" is on display through October, and the public is invited to meet the artist at the gallery Oct. 10 from 3 to 7 p.m.

"Each [painting] began with a feeling about light -- something that caught my attention about light," said Carter.

One of her most recent acrylics, "Shafts of Light," had its beginning in sunlight that entered a darker room, "a little crack of light that spread out on the floor." Dappled light, the play of light on an arrangement of intertwined branches, sunlight hitting a spider's web -- "I'm extremely responsive to how light plays and creates with texture and form."

Both painting and photography are primarily about light, said Carter. But while her classical training taught her to control light in her photography studio, "in painting, it controls itself," she noted. Photography captures the external reality of light; painting is an internal, emotional response to light.

So while a painting may begin with a remembered sharp detail or perhaps the memory of how that detail made her feel -- "the thing that pulled me in," said Carter, the process "leads into other places" that may be entirely unexpected.

Carter works a canvas in layers, over days and weeks, with "no idea where it's going. It seems to come from somewhere else," she said. "The more I 'let go,' the more energy and spontaneity there is."

A painting, she said, "seems to get worse right before it gets better. And at some point, it seems to resolve; I have a sense that it's completing itself." She compared the work to a journal: "Paintings are a record of life at that point, painting clarifies what's going on."

Bill Hester, who rehanges his gallery each time he brings in a new artist, seeks out local talent in addition to the internationally acclaimed artists he features. In Carter's acrylics he found "an explosion of feeling, an expansion of boundaries. I can go right on into a piece and keep going. That, for me, is the concept of infinity."

Hester looks for artists who can push beyond their comfort level, and when Carter told him she had been thinking about mixing photography with painting, Hester urged her forward.

Two of these pieces are on display. In one, Carter used a paper negative process to create the photographed image, and in the other she used Photoshop to juxtapose images.

For her mixed media, Carter knew she needed an archetypal, iconic image. "You have to have a strong photographic image to work with something as strong as paint," she said. She found her answer in the figure of a man emerging from darkness. And now she has in mind several other iconic images she wants to work with.

"I'm very excited about it," said Carter of her latest creative leap. "This is a new direction -- and it's just the tip of the iceberg. It's not painting, and it's not photography. It's something else."

--- **GO & DO** What: Catharine Carter's acrylic paintings, Charged Particles
When: Through October; reception Oct. 10 Where: Bill Hester Fine Art, 143F West Franklin St. in Chapel Hill's University Square. Call 960-0059 for hours and information.