



"Kaena Point," Noreen Naughton, 9 by 18 inches, oil on linen, 2007, among works that can be seen at Art Treasures Gallery.

Noreen Naughton photos

BY SUE KIYABU

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When Noreen Naughton discusses her work, the soft-spoken retired art instructor does so with intense concentration, bowing her head slightly and choosing her words carefully.

She is no less scrupulous about her method of artwork than she is about her verbal communication. Naughton opens her notebook, worn at the corners and thick with personal ciphers: splotches of thickly applied paint on canvas taped in one corner, a photograph of sky underneath, rough line drawings

in black ink in another, finite formulas and detailed observations noted throughout.

The work from "Light, Trees and Ocean's Edge," now at the Art Treasures Gallery in Chinatown, gives a different impression. The pieces in the show, thick with impasto and expressive brush strokes, suggest movement and swiftness of time.

When asked about her meticulous preparation and the liveliness of the work, she says succinctly, "It's the underpinning that holds everything together."

"I equate it to a composer who has to decide what key to compose in, so there is a creative parameter in which to work," Naughton said. "With limitation, you can go deeper. If one is throwing in the kitchen sink, there is too much cacophony and it fails."

Musical analogy works for Naughton, who played cello with the Honolulu Symphony. She says she's the only artist she knows who "cannot paint with music in the background," yet music still influences her work and her process.

"I think about and respond to a painting as if it is a music composition," Naughton wrote in an e-mail. "Even though in my own painting I use a specific subject matter, such as the trees or a sunset, I feel I create as if the painting is pure sound: line as melody, positive and negative shapes as sound and silence, movement as rhythm, and color structure as harmony or disharmony."

She works in the plein-air tradition but allows for improvisation.

Naughton may create boundaries through method — working with only circular brushes, adding lines to flatten or enlarge the plane, restraining her color palette or increasing surface tension through impasto.

Most of the paintings in the show were created this year, though some works began three years ago.

"Her paintings overcome the discipline of her sketchbook," says David Behlke, director of Koa Gallery. "(Her effort) doesn't jump out at you, but that's the beautiful restraint of it."

Naughton works on several series simultaneously. Whether she's looking out her studio window, sitting on a North Shore beach or walking through Ho'omaluhia Garden, she waits for an image "that she's never seen before."

She doesn't try to replicate nature but chases something more illusive.

"In the landscape, the motif is affected by the shifting light," said Naughton. "It happens in a split second — the way the light hits the background or the leaves — it's indeed an image that may only last five seconds. I usually try to imprint that in my mind's eye and work from there."

IN HARMONY

Artist composes paintings like music



"Green Ground," Noreen Naughton, 12 by 18 inches, oil on linen, 2006.

'LIGHT, TREES AND OCEAN'S EDGE'

Art Treasures Gallery,
1136 Nu'uuanu Ave.,
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She thinks of painting as a conversation between the artist and the canvas and allows the work to sit for a month or longer. She'll recheck her notebook and perhaps only make one mark.

Naughton shies away from the analytical once the work is well under way, but says that her intellectual prep work and meticulous documentation remain a strong presence.

"I equate this to a violinist playing a concerto, completely in their right brain, soaring above," Naughton said.



"Intertwined Trees," Noreen Naughton, 12 by 18 inches, oil on linen, 2006.

"You could stop that artist at any moment and ask them why you are extending the note, and they could explain it. At the moment the right brain needs to soar, but the left brain, it's still there."