

IN THE ARTS

Color my world: Artist takes 'A Closer Look'

BY CHRIS SLATTERY
STAFF WRITER

She says she listens mostly to Ryan Adams when she paints, and U2 — especially their last CD, the elegiac "How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb." Jazz, too, and some classical. But Chevy Chase artist Sophia McCrocklin's work brings to mind that ubiquitous song by James Blunt: "You're beautiful, you're beautiful, you're beautiful, it's true."

Evocative, exuberant, saturated with eye-popping color, McCrocklin's painted collages straddle the line between fine art and folk art, and they do so beautifully.

"Why not create beauty?" muses McCrocklin, 46. "That's a worthy endeavor. I make stuff I want to live with, that makes me look forward to the future, that gives me hope."

Hope is an emotion that comes in colors; McCrocklin's landscapes and still lifes crackle with it. Her collages utilize large and small scraps recycled from her previously painted canvases. There are paintings that seem so pleased with themselves that they burst into a shower of confetti.

"I love brilliant color," says McCrocklin. "It makes me happy. It's fun, it's cheerful, it's inviting."

Words that describe the artist's magazine-gorgeous Chevy Chase home, decorated for Halloween right down to the faux flies artfully scattered on an antique sideboard beside a gingerbread haunted house. It's light and airy, warm and welcoming — and up on the third floor is the sun washed studio where McCrocklin makes art, overseen by the rows of Pez dispensers she keeps around for inspiration.

"I'm using bits and pieces to make a whole," she explains. "In a lot of my work, I'm recycling."

Which makes sense because McCrocklin started her career as an environmental lawyer.

"I wanted to use my life to do



CHARLIE SHOEMAKER/THE GAZETTE

Color, beauty and light: Sophia McCrocklin at work in her Chevy Chase studio.

something positive," she says, describing her work in areas like strip mining and solid waste disposal.

Not a pretty subject, perhaps, "but it helps our world become prettier."

"Art is necessary for me to breathe," she says. "And so is clean air."

Torts and quilts

"Kentucky is my place," the artist says. "I grew up there — in Louisville and also in a rural area."

After boarding school, McCrocklin studied studio art at Smith College and textiles at Penland School of Crafts; she went to law school at the University of Louisville.

"Economics and art," she says. "I

like economic theory; it's fascinating."

Her mom — a successful businesswoman and one of Harvard Business School's first female students — taught McCrocklin how to sew.

"I made a lot of my clothes," she says. "And I had this line of clothing. My background is in textiles."

The focal point of her dining room is a quilt McCrocklin hand-crafted: "I'm from Kentucky," she shrugs, "people make quilts there."

And "here," McCrocklin has transferred many of that folk art's elements to her collages. They are on canvas and other materials, too; they utilize pattern and color and texture. And looking at the paintings she has prepared for her show at Bethesda's Orchard Gallery is like viewing a

designer's runway collection.

"In art, there is theory, there is thought," she says. "There's a sincerity there that runs through a body of work."

What unifies this body of work? "A Closer Look" is the name of McCrocklin's latest show, which runs through the end of November. The pieces evoke the masters — Monet, Matisse and Hockney, especially — but the homage is tempered with whimsy and wit.

"You want to look at the masters, but you don't want to copy," she says. "Then you're not doing something new."

"It's hard to do something new!"

Art and soul

"The idea," the artist says, "is to go beyond — to go past the concept."

She keeps a book of wildflowers in her studio but uses it sparingly; a bright pink-and-green origami waterlily provides inspiration and the art books lying around include the works of the 19th century Japanese block print maker Munakata Shiko.

"I like David Hockney," McCrocklin says. "I love the warmth that he gives. And Matisse — he's one of my inspirations. He was a lawyer, he did a lot of paintings and then, at the end of his life he's doing cutouts."

Matisse "used more flat color," she explains. McCrocklin uses pigments that pop, and coupled with the cutout technique produces art that's dimensional and emotional. "Simplicity's hard," she says. "It's the hardest thing to do."

And yet her work is the soul of simplicity: bold and graphic, clean except for the surprising scatter of recycled canvas. She uses a rotary blade, hand-saving spring-loaded scissors, and jewelers' tools to manipulate the tiny jewel-like scraps, which bind to the pigment and acrylic medium upon which they're laid.

Her work is emotional, McCrocklin says, because the studio is her place to be in touch with what's within.

"This, for me, is where I find my soul," she says. "It's like breathing for me."

Sophia McCrocklin's exhibit, "A Closer Look" is at the Orchard Gallery, 7917 Norfolk Ave., Bethesda. Hours are Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. The opening reception is Thursday from 6-9 p.m.; the Bethesda Art Walk takes place Friday Nov. 10 from 6-9 p.m., and the Artist's Talk is Saturday, Nov. 11 at 2 p.m. Call 240-497-1912.

ARTS CALENDAR

DANCES

Contra Dance — Friday Night Dancers: Nov. 3, 7:30-8:15 p.m. lesson, 8:30-11:30 p.m. dancing to the Nettles, Barb Kirchner calling, Glen Echo Park's Spanish Ballroom, 7300 MacArthur Blvd., \$8, info@fridaynightdance.org, www.fridaynight-dance.org.

Swing Dance — Washington Swing Dance Committee: Nov. 4, 8-9 p.m. lesson, 9 p.m.-midnight dancing to The Junkyard Saints, Glen Echo Park's Spanish Ballroom, 7300 MacArthur Blvd., \$12, 301-340-9732, www.wsd.org.

Waltz Dance — Waltz Time: Nov. 5, 3-3:30 p.m. lesson; 3:30-6 p.m. dancing to Terpsichore, Glen Echo Park's Spanish Ballroom, 7300 MacArthur Blvd., \$8, www.dancedc.com/waltz.html.

Contra & Square Dance — Folklore Society of Greater Washington: Nov. 5, 7 p.m. newcomers welcome lesson; 7:30-10:30 p.m. called dances, Glen Echo Park's Spanish Ballroom, 7300 MacArthur Blvd., \$10, \$8 members, 202-518-1299, www.fsgw.org.

MUSIC

Artist in Residence Program — Bambu Station reggae band, 7:30 p.m. Nov. 1, Mansion at Strathmore, 10701 Rockville Pike, North Bethesda, \$10, 301-581-5100.

Jewish Foundation for Group Homes Gala — 23rd annual event: The Beach Boys, 7:30 p.m. Nov. 2, Music Center at Strathmore, 5301 Tuckerman Lane, North Bethesda, \$175-plus, 301-581-5100.

Friday Morning Music Club — Classical music, 11 a.m. Nov. 2, Mansion at Strathmore, 10701 Rockville Pike, North Bethesda, free, 301-581-5100.

D.C. Federation of Music Clubs — American women composer concert: compositions by Leslie Bennett, Winifred Hyson, Jo Lombard, Jamie Sims & Wang An-Ming, 11 a.m. Nov. 3, Mansion at Strathmore, 10701 Rockville Pike, North Bethesda, free, 301-762-8334.

Music in the Mansion — The Davey Yarborough Quartet featuring Esther Williams, 7:30 p.m. Nov. 3, Mansion at Strathmore, 10701 Rockville Pike, North Bethesda, \$26, \$23 seniors, \$15 students, 301-581-5100.

Strathmore Presents — Orquestra De Sao

Paulo, 8 p.m. Nov. 3, \$21-\$62; Bo Diddley & Friends, 8 p.m. Nov. 8, \$25-\$55, Music Center at Strathmore, 5301 Tuckerman Lane, North Bethesda, 301-581-5100.

National Philharmonic — Verdi's Requiem, with soloists Linda Mabbs, Elizabeth Bishop, Michael Hendricks & Kevin Deas, 8 p.m. Nov. 4, Music Center at Strathmore, 5301 Tuckerman Lane, North Bethesda, \$25-\$79, free ages 7-17, 301-581-5100.

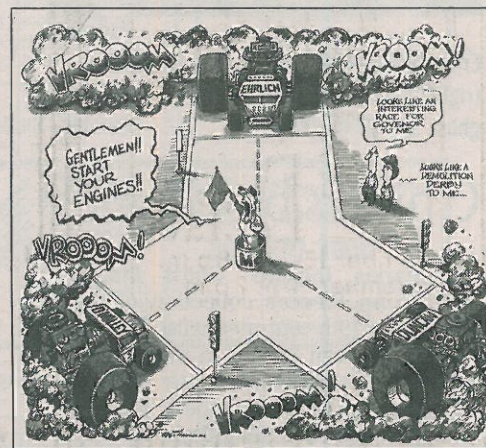
Washington Balalaika Society Orchestra — "Russian Romance," 4 p.m. Nov. 5, Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church, 6601 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda, \$20, \$18 seniors & students, 703-644-9151.

ON STAGE

'Dorothy Meets Alice' — Scrambled stories, to Dec. 3, 1:30 & 3:30 p.m. Sat. & Sun., ASL interpretation 1:30 p.m. Dec. 3, Adventure Theatre, Glen Echo Park, 7300 MacArthur Blvd., \$8, 301-320-5331.

'Hansel & Gretel' — Marionette adaptation of Humperdink's children's opera, to Nov. 17, 10 &

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Get into the election mode by visiting an exhibit of Kevin 'KAL' Kallaughner's political cartoons at The Mansion at Strathmore. This one is from the Sept. 28, 2005 Baltimore Sun.