

The Arts

Pratorius paints the architecture of color

By KEVIN COSTELLO
CORRESPONDENT

SARASOTA — A painting's poetry often resides in its balance of color or tone, and in its architectural line or rhythm.

The semi-geometric, abstract paintings of German-born, Miami-based Bianca Pratorius, currently on view at the Mira Mar Gallery, well illustrate this concern with emotional equilibrium.

Not as cerebral as the work of pure mathematical abstractionists, nor as darkly romantic and agitated as the mid-20th century Expressionists, Pratorius' acrylic paintings take a middle ground between these two traditions, combining architectural forms and color-field painting.

The overall structure of the paintings suggests architecture in elevation, as well as boundaries observed from above, as in aerial views. In effect, the paintings suggest two simultaneous views of the same site. The differential between figure and ground is created through lines incised into her impasto pigment, which are fragile and as much a lattice as a boundary between colors.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Bianca Pratorius' acrylics combine architectural forms and color-field painting.

Pratorius says that she derives her shapes from architectural cityscapes. She writes: "I create my paintings with the city in mind, but rather than depicting specific objects, such as a house, a park or a church, I express my architectural intention by borrowing and appropriating sites, places and names to create a composition that alludes to city life environment."

The effect is restrained line enlivened by lush color; block-like units of tone, clearly separating form and dimensional space. Within these blocks, Pratorius scratches, scrapes and otherwise exposes the underpainting to produce a fragile texture that endows the stable surfaces with a hidden, nervous energy.

The "accidental" spaces between these blocks of color engage the viewer's emotions much the same way one discovers an attractive square or boulevard when turning a corner in a new city.

And her palette — vibrant, fun-loving colors that are neither European nor American, but more Caribbe-

an and Hispanic — are applied with a confident, impasto energy. They draw the viewer away from the more austere European origins of geometric abstraction and lead to a warmer, limpid mood.

While Pratorius employs a current and personal vocabulary, she maintains an appreciation for her antecedents. Apparent influences include the architectural spaces that frame 14th- and 15th-century Italian religious paintings, as well as the "Ocean Park" series by the late Richard Diebenkorn. This characteristic — balancing personal color with historic line — has been gaining more adherents since its re-introduction by the Neo-Expressionists of the 1980s.

Pratorius also has infused the architecture of her formalist painting with lyrical color. The German poet, playwright and novelist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in a letter to a friend, wrote "I call architecture frozen music." Pratorius restates that sentiment by melting the harmonics of her color into the architecture of her paintings



TICKETS

Bianca Pratorius
Paintings. Continues
through Oct. 26 at
Allyn Gallup
Contemporary Art,
Mira Mar Gallery, 1284
N. Palm Ave.,
Sarasota. Call
366-2093.