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Prolific by nature: Spectacular watercolor paintings have made Joseph Raffael a giant in his field

BY STACY NICK • STACYNICK@COLORADOAN.COM • JUNE 25, 2009

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Sometimes in the art world, you gotta go big. And if you're Joseph Raffael, you gotta go really, really big.

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The 75-year-old master painter's works average about 60 inches tall and 80 inches wide.

"The scale, the colors, the vibrancy — these works are just stunning," said Marianne Lorenz, executive director of the Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art, who is positively giddy with the museum's latest coup, an exhibit of a dozen of Raffael's most recent works. Part of the photorealism movement, Raffael takes photos of his subjects and then uses them to paint from, Lorenz said. All of the paintings in this show are focused on flowers from the artist's own garden in Antibes, France.

The idea may sound cliché — watercolors of flowers — but the result is anything but.

"It's flowers in a vase but not 'flowers in a vase'," Lorenz said. "Raffael's work is about our relationship with nature and what we can be capable of.

"A lot of people think watercolors are an 'amateur' medium," she added. "But Raffael defies almost every expectation of what watercolors should look like. People think 'small' and his works are huge; people think it's only for 'Sunday painters' and he's an established master."

Watercolors are also an extremely difficult-to-control medium, Lorenz said. That makes his highly detailed, large scale works all the more impressive.

That detail is especially apparent in "Blossoms & Sky," which focuses in on an Apple Blossom branch against a deeply-hued sky. "It looks like Monet came to visit," Lorenz said.



JOSEPH RAFFAEL EXHIBIT

When: Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays and noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays; the show ends Aug. 20

Where: Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art, 201 S. College Ave.

Cost: \$2; members, students and children ages 17 and younger admitted for free Information: 482-2787 or www.fcmoca.org



A close-up of Joseph Raffael's 'Solstice.' The exhibit runs through Aug. 20 at Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art. (Miranda Grubbs/The Coloradoan)

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Keith Howard of Arvada and Georgina Haddenhorst of Fort Collins discuss 'Summer's Dream of Spring' by Joseph Raffael at the Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art. (Miranda Grubbs/The Coloradoan)



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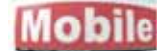
These pieces are truly extraordinary! I look forward to seeing them when I return to Colorado. My brother bought me a wall size poster (made of three panels) of a Monet when I was younger and the sheer size of it makes you stop for a moment in a crazy day. I am sure Raffael's work does the same = which we could all do with some of.....

Kirsti
6/25/2009 10:52:47 PM

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Keith Howard of Arvada and Georgina Haddenhorst of Fort Collins, contemplate the artwork of Joseph Raffael at the Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art. (Miranda Grubbs/The Coloradoan)

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