

Surveying the scene

Exhibit flows well through gallery rooms

by Grace Cote

Rare artists traverse media effortlessly, and such rarity can be found in *Lee Hall: A Survey*, the artist's first solo exhibition since 1981.

A landscapist, Hall paints scenes of urban buildings, deserts, rolling green hills and seascapes. They flow well in a survey show like this because they are all abstracted to the point of bare recognition; it's clear the scenes are merely an avenue for her explorations in color and composition.

In this exhibition at Jerald Melberg Gallery, the paintings are organized by color more than anything else, transitioning from light to dark through the three partitioned rooms. Hall's paintings look very much like collage, with large masses floating and laying atop each other; swished, swirled brushstrokes are contained within the confines of these edges.



Harmonious palettes in bright tones appear in works like the eye-pleasing "Connecticut Spring Meadows" (1980) (image left), with its abstracted swaths of spring color. "Connecticut Summer Shore" (1984) is a view of sailing yachts, distilled to their essential shapes: Voluminous triangles lean toward the left amidst yellow cream and mustard.

The back of the gallery holds the best work, like "Granite Hill" (1978), with bruised gray and blue masses layered upon each other, appropriately sparkling with muted glitter in some sections. The painting suggests huge granite boulders darkening a sunny day, as a small



triangle of yellow peeks from the upper edge of the canvas. "Rhode Island Sea Dawn" (1978) (image left) on the adjacent wall, is stunning with its bands of navy, neon yellow, black, dark green and tan. Your eyes will train upon this yellow and not let go easily; the color is both pungent and symbolic of the hopefulness of daybreak.

Hall's work in collage, which began in earnest in the 1980s, appears in this show as the Rome Wall Studies, a series of approximately 10-inch-by-7-inch works of layered paper in the most saturated versions of their hues, each with a blood red underpainting.

Hall was born and raised in Lexington, N.C., and enrolled in the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina (now UNC Greensboro) to study art, art history, literature and philosophy. In 1955, she began graduate school at New York University; there, she established relationships with noted abstract expressionists, all of whom exhibited at the premier modernist gallery, Betty Parsons. Hall exhibited throughout New York, eventually landing two solo shows at the Parsons gallery in 1975 and 1977.

While Hall's estate and body of work have been promised to the Bechtler Museum, the folks at the latter venue have graciously allowed Jerald Melberg Gallery to show her work in order to introduce it to the community. The match is appropriate, not only because of Melberg's proven love of collage and collage-style paintings but also because of his refusal to sacrifice quality in a market saturated with designer art.

The morning after the show opened, Melberg hosted Hall for his customary "Coffee and Conversation," and it proved to be exceptionally worthwhile. Discussing life as an artist, she admitted, "It's not easy work, but it's a terrific life." During the lecture, she defined art as "the appropriation of beauty and truth," and she also spoke briefly and discouragingly about soaring art market prices. "Art is not a commodity; it's serious," she proclaimed. "The new trends are deep and fragrant bullshit; it's like looking for original sin — you'll never find it."

Notably, Hall's style changes very little throughout this survey, which shows work from her entire career. Consistent in composition, the variances emerge in color and media. Hall noted that a "search for the new" was not her job; instead, it is verification of the eternal.