

Vanderleelie winds up Smith exhibition

VISUAL ARTS

BY RUSSELL BINGHAM

Mitchel Smith is talking about his new paintings that recently finished at the Vanderleelie Gallery, and is struggling to find the answer to a question about the content of his art. Smith is an abstract painter, and the idea of content and how it relates to abstraction is puzzling, and something that Smith has obviously been asked about before.

"That's hard to answer," he says. "What's good about art is not descriptive content, I don't think. In painting it's not narrative obviously or there wouldn't be any good abstract paintings, which I think there are. Or likewise, all of the Renaissance paintings of the crucifixion would be equal in terms of quality, which they're not.

"I think that if art doesn't move

you, if it's not about esthetic emotion and feeling, then it's not worth anything. That's the bottom line. It should evoke feeling, aesthetic feeling anyway and if you're a painter you try to make something that hopefully does that."

Subtle depth

Mitchel Smith is a very good abstract painter, one of the best in a city that boasts quite a number of good abstract painters. His work is essentially involved with color and surface and his paintings have a graceful, often elegantly accomplished look that can occasionally conceal their subtle depth, a fact that became apparent upon viewing his recent exhibition.

In fact, a couple of the best pictures that were in the Vanderleelie show — a large opaquely painted

brown work called "Viking Sere-nade" and a smaller blue picture named "Nitty Gritty" — seemed to stand apart from the others, simply because of their rougher appearance.

Their roughness was slightly off-putting at first, but given time to digest these paintings got better. Ultimately, they revealed themselves to have more staying power than some of the suaver, more seductive paintings.

"Long Story"

The mural-sized "Long Story," though, was immediately appealing, and also the best painting in the exhibition. At 10 feet long, it was ambitious both in its scale and for what it accomplished as a work of art. Assembled in broad, sweeping strokes of paint with an all over

orange color scheme that shifted into greys and flesh tones, the painting was like a grand Turner landscape seen through the organic eye of Cezanne.

Smith says he often gets his ideas for his paintings from looking at his older pictures. He may also get suggestions from looking at things from nature or sometimes from the urban environment, like how a broken piece of sidewalk or concrete looks.

"Or often it's just an idea for a color. You decide you'd like to do a painting that's sort of an aqua color or something. But that's just a starting point. Once you get going, you just do what the painting seems to dictate needs to be done. And invariably, the end result is much different from what you originally conceived it was going to be." ●

GALLERY REAT by Wendy Boulding