

Harmony in colour

Neustaedter balances drawing and textural experimentation

Paintings by

Chrissandra Neustaedter

Date.....**Nov. 21-28**
6:30 p.m.

Opening.....**Friday, Nov. 21**
7-10 p.m.

Venue ..**Jenkins Showler Gallery**
1539 Johnston Rd.

Info**604-535-7445**
jenkinsshowlergallery.com

by Alex Browne

Arts Reporter

Those violas and guitars and pianos you see in Chrissandra Neustaedter's bright acrylic/multimedia paintings are not there by chance.

The artist, her work featured this week at Jenkins Showler Gallery, trained extensively in piano and voice, gaining ARCT from Toronto's Conservatory of Music and ALCM from London's College of Music in England.

Many have seen a stained-glass-like quality in her paint-on-wood works, which employ strong, black drawn outlines raised with a liquid plaster medium, containing areas of bold, highly textured colours, then sanded down to emphasize the black lines and create a more consistent, carved-looking surface.

But to her, they're more analogous with musical compositions—the black lines providing the melody, while the tones and vivid colours provide the harmony.

"Music and painting overlap a lot," the Nanoose Bay resident said.

"It's all about composition and colour and being tonal and visual at the same time. Even rhythm has its own appearance."

Since she decided to make the leap to paint full time, she has switched priorities. Until a year and a half ago, she was teaching piano and painting in her spare time. Now, she plays music only as a hobby.

She's been staggeringly successful,



winning representation in seven galleries coast-to-coast—her warm, welcoming, largely domestic scenes obviously forging a strong connection with the art-buying market.

"It's really taken off," she said.

"I'm painting all the time. I'm really happy and surprised, although I've been working really hard to do it."

The Chilliwack born Neustaedter dabbled in the arts during her years in Chilliwack Senior Secondary's Fine Arts program, and after graduation she took selected painting classes at Scottsdale Artist's School in Arizona.

But a near-death experience on the streets of Vancouver in her mid 20s became a turning point.

Crossing an intersection, she was hit by a truck that ran a red light; a serious head injury led to extended convalescence.

"It made me think about life being too short, about leaving something I would have wanted to do undone when I passed away, whenever that was.

"I don't know if it was a conscious deci-

sion at the time. It's always in hindsight that you see where you've come from, where a decision has led you."

The decision to reconnect with the arts ultimately led her to spend three years at Emily Carr College of Art and Design, where she experimented with different media to create a three-dimensional look.

She also completed studies at London College of Music, then went on to drawing and music classes in France.

A four-year stay in Calgary with her husband Curt found her dividing time between teaching piano and an artists' co-op.

Neustaedter finds interest in subjects by focusing on details of a scene, and as someone keen on decorating and architecture, admits many of her rooms are imaginary, idealized interiors.

She describes her textured style as a product of "pure experimentation."

"We did some renovations and we had a left-over bucket of drywall (mud), so I started experimenting with that; moving it around with a palette knife."

The outline style, in which she traces over her original pencil drawing with black-tinted liquid plaster, was the result of a mistake, she said, then quickly corrected herself.

"There are no mistakes, are there?"

"One time I thought I didn't like what I did and so I decided to sand it off, and that showed me something else. Anything that doesn't work—there's always a reason for it.

"Now I sand off the basic top layer which creates a more carved, rather than built-up appearance. The acrylic is acrylic and stays much the same, but underneath is the black and that does come out more."

It has led her into more experimentation with the effect of layered colours revealed through sanding.

"I see more of my art heading in that direction, continuing with texture and building that up; adding more or different elements, possibly."