

## Maakestad portrays urbanism in a new light

Review by  
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What do parking lots and bright colors have in common? Simple, Susan Maakestad. Maakestad graced Millsaps College with her presence this past Friday, Oct. 26 during a gallery talk in the Lewis Art Gallery to close her show "Urban Abstraction." This exhibit has been up in the art gallery for the past month.

Maakestad, who graduated from the University of Iowa and is now teaching painting at the Memphis College of Art, says her goal in painting is to paint things that often remain overlooked.

"A lot of these things are parking lots, or covert, sculptural looking things," she explains.

When you first enter the gallery you are suddenly confronted with very bright and colorful looking landscapes hung ever so neatly on the walls of the gallery.

In her talk, Maakestad described the culture shock she felt after having grown up in the midwest and then moving to urban Memphis.

She was suddenly confronted with the aspects of urbanism that she had never encountered, which is reflected in her work.

She enjoys the ambiguity of her work and hopes that a parallel exists in her work that it will remain in the ambiguous in between abstraction and reality.

The emotions evoked by these urban locations are equally important as well.

"I feel bad and lonely when I'm in a parking lot...there's something unattractive about these places," Maakestad says.

Maakestad begins her work process by taking a wide array of photographs, though she is not quite sure exactly what she will do with them, she continues to shoot pictures and then continues her work from them.

After having the photos developed, Maakestad does watercolors of the photos that she feels a continued calling from.

"I reduce; reduce until I get something I like," she explains.

She will work on four or five watercolors at a time and she sits to work on her watercolors whereas she stands when working with her oil paints.

Maakestad's use of color is not only prominent but powerful.

"I like the idea of seducing people with the color and then going in for the kill though it isn't on purpose," she says, referring to the

emotion that her paintings evoke from viewers.

The paintings are seductive in their use of colors, but when one gets a closer look a sudden feeling of loneliness and isolation takes over as a result of the subjects she paints. These parking lots and covert places are urban, structural and forlorn.

Maakestad's use of color plays an important role in the portrayal of light. She uses the bright colors to give a sense of light.

"If (the colors) read as light then that was OK...I could live with the bright colors," she says.

In terms of scale, Maakestad's pieces are generally small and she discussed the realization after graduate school that she didn't have to work in large scale but that small was accepted as well.

The influence of Bill Jensen's small paintings (an artist she admired) as well as the benefits of small canvases when she was in between studios at one point are both factors that contributed to her use of small scale.

She also feels an intimacy with her small paintings.

"I have touched every bit of the canvas," she reflects. Every bit of her canvases were left that way for a reason.



Photo by Alyce Howe

Artist Susan Maakestad spoke about her work at a gallery talk last Friday.