

## 'Four Voices' unfold at Amy Simon's new Westport gallery

By Joel Lang

March 8, 2020



To label or not to label: that was the question the Westport gallerist Amy Simon faced in mounting her current exhibition, "Unfolding Dialogue: Four Voices," that includes the painter Donald Martiny.

Now in his mid-sixties and based in North Carolina, Martiny made a very public splash in 2015 when he was chosen to do two monumental paintings for the lobby of One World Trade Center in Manhattan. Media reports showed him working on site, drenched in paint, using only his hands for brushes.

The three new paintings at Simon's gallery are miniature by comparison, but they are still large, swiped arcs color (one in blue is almost seven feet tall) and require the same spoiler alert.

Martiny's paintings are 100 percent solid paint. They have no frame, no canvas. They exist in near total independence from any underlying surface, except for the wall they hang on. From a distance, they look like the abstract gestures they are. Their extraordinary thick contours reveal themselves only up close.

"Where am I going to put a label for a Martiny?" Simon says she asked herself. "It's flying on the wall. You put a label next to it, it ruins it."

Even if she had put a minimalist label up, it wouldn't have explained much. All three are "polymer and dispersed pigment on aluminum," but no aluminum is visible. And in fact the paint, which Martiny takes hours to mix and uses by the gallon, does not penetrate the metal. It acts more like a base for a sculpture.

Labels might have been less intrusive for the other three artists in the exhibit, but Simon wanted to be consistent and says labeling is falling out of fashion anyway. All three are widely exhibited abstractionists.

Carolanna Parlato and Carin Riley, both based in New York, are the most conventional in the sense they apply paint to canvas or paper. They are stylistic opposites though.

manage to hint at other colors hidden underneath. One painting has mustard colored swatches just thick enough to look like they could be peeled off.

By contrast, Riley's paintings are delicate webs done in pastel and watercolor. The brushstrokes are calligraphic, every inch of each one visible. Weaving is said to be one of Riley's influences.

The fourth painter in the exhibit, Rosalind Tallmadge, is trickier. Her paintings are done in gold or silver leaf on sequin fabric, with flecks of mica or glass beads mixed in. They can look as flat as metallic mirrors. Or they can look intricate and shiny, as if made from papery chain-mail.

In one, tiny green beads flicker on and off like Christmas lights: none, three, a dozen, depending on the viewing angle. In a 2018 interview, Tallmadge, who is based in Brooklyn, said she thinks of the sequin fabric as a kind of skin.

Simon chose "Unfolding Dialogue" as the title for the exhibit because, she says, "With all four of these artists the common thread is the art unfolds off the medium. There's layers. The more you look, the more you see coming out."

As for the absence of labels, there's a printed price list and on site help. "I'm sitting there at the desk and I can talk to people. My assistant does the same thing," Simon says. "It's a gallery; it's not a big impersonal place. Usually somebody walks in and we start to chat."

The Simon gallery recently relocated to downtown Westport. The "Unfolding Dialogue" exhibit runs to March 28.

Not part of the exhibit, but demanding its own attention at the rear of the gallery is a "paper painting" by Amy Genser, who lives in West Hartford.

Titled "Sanctuary," it is basically constructed from tightly rolled tubes of paper cut into discs, the way a baker might cut cookie dough. Because the discs vary in thickness, the surface of "Sanctuary" is irregular, topographic. The discs themselves vary in color. Hundreds were used to make "Sanctuary" that, with its aqua blue background, can suggest a Pacific archipelago.

discs do resemble amoeba that can't hold their shape. Her paintings have been likened to both aerial landscapes and cellular activity. Either works.

*Joel Lang is a freelance writer.*