

LORETTA DOMASZEWSKI

By: Michele Dieterich

My first experience with Loretta Domaszewski's art work was a quick glimpse in Artifacts Gallery. It was a painting of a wintry corridor bound by barren branches above and the shadows they cast on the twilight-tinged snow below. Though I was standing in sterile, tungsten light, I felt the cool blue glow of winter's dusk and heard its ominous silence, as if I had embarked on a lonely journey through the woods. I was mesmerized. The shadowy path was both foreboding and inviting. I wanted to step inside the canvas and feel the mysterious light at the end of that treelined corridor. Domaszewski had captured more than just the impression of a wintry landscape; she had opened its mysteries to me and evoked the emotions I have felt only while amidst a snow-filled wilderness. She also urged me to explore the path which she feels is "symbolic of the spiritual journey or search" that we follow throughout our lives.

Upon further exploration of her work, I found that the impressionistic landscapes of sensuous colors and lighted corridors are merely a starting point. The textures, shapes, forms, and incredible light she takes from nature represent a provocative theme of transition and motion. "I always feel an emotional response to landscapes. That is where my work begins," she told me. "But I feel that there is more that I need to express than to just paint the impressions of nature." One avenue she found was a series of nomadic, almost circus-like tents that sit on desert beaches with light emanating from slightly open doorways. In one piece, a group of dark figures stand near the door in a moment of hesitation before entering the tent, symbolic of that temporary point of transition, before discovering the light and rejuvenating energy that change can bring if we only let it.

While nature around us is in a constant state of flux from dawn to dusk and winter to spring, we animals of intellect strive to create permanence through routine and

galvanized steel structures meant to stand forever. We are constantly avoiding those temporary, transitional times in life that come as sure as the winter snows in Montana. It is exactly this moment of doubt and intrigue before we give in to change that fascinates Domaszewski. In her own words, that moment that pervades the body of her work in tents, temporary structures, paths and corridors is "a dreamlike fusion of fantasy and reality."

Domaszewski originally trained as a sculptor at Boston's prestigious Museum School. Upon graduation, she chose to leave the more immediate art scene of Boston to return to nature and be near the brilliant salt marshes of Nantucket, reminiscent of her childhood in Connecticut. "I like to hike to a secluded area so I can be absorbed or lost in the environment. I listen to the birds, watch what the wind does to the landscape and the light, especially late at night or early morning when the light is most intense," she explains.

Space was at a premium during her twelve summers on Nantucket Island, so she changed from sculpture to the mediums of paint and pastel. Now as her works evolves, she finds herself trying to "take the painting off the wall," making it less decorative and more experiential. Her paintings become a part of the room instead of wallpaper. The dead wood, willows, and reeds she finds as she paints in nature are woven around, lashed to and sewn through her paintings as frames or used to create standing screen-like structures, so the viewer can walk around rather than stand before them.

Most intriguing are the structures she builds out of her paintings. Somewhat rickety or temporary, four-sided shelters are created from paintings lashed to and held up by withered reed stilts. Like the nomadic tents, they resemble lean-tos and jerry-built shacks constructed from whatever is available in nature: a safe place, but by no means permanent. Like Anasazi ruins, they seem to have been built, filled with life and then mysteriously abandoned.

Domaszewski feels "a spiritual connection" with her work in the studio. While she tries to bring what nature gives us and teaches us into the studio with her, she also thinks "about life, death, eternal life...All those questions that we ask ourselves. That is what goes on in the studio with me," she explains. "I am not just dealing with color, shape and form. There are all of these other things going on there."

The passionate, searing colors and organic textures of her work express a deep understanding and concern for nature. In 1990, that love of the outdoors brought her to Bozeman's wide, open spaces where she is currently the Artist-in-Residence at Bozeman High School. Though she has never purposely tried to make a statement about our relationship with the environment, it is deeply inherent in her work. "I think about our culture and past cultures and humankind's relationships to the land and the environment now as opposed to back then. Our present attitude to the environment really has me concerned."

That concern is expressed in works included in a variety of environmentally-motivated art shows like: "Environmental Perspectives" at the University of Oregon, Eugene; "Animal Imagery" at the Animal Welfare and Education Center in New Jersey; and "Environmental Impact Statement," a travelling show out of the Missoula Museum of Art. The realization that her work is inherently entwined in the environment has spurred her to begin a series on endangered and extinct animals. It will be the first time she deals directly with an environmental issue.

Domaszewski is represented by galleries in New York City and Nantucket, and is currently exhibiting in a one-woman show at Roanoke, Virginia's Art on a Higher Level. Her work can be found locally at Artifacts Gallery in Bozeman, the Gadwall Gallery in Big Sky, and the Wade Gallery in Livingston.