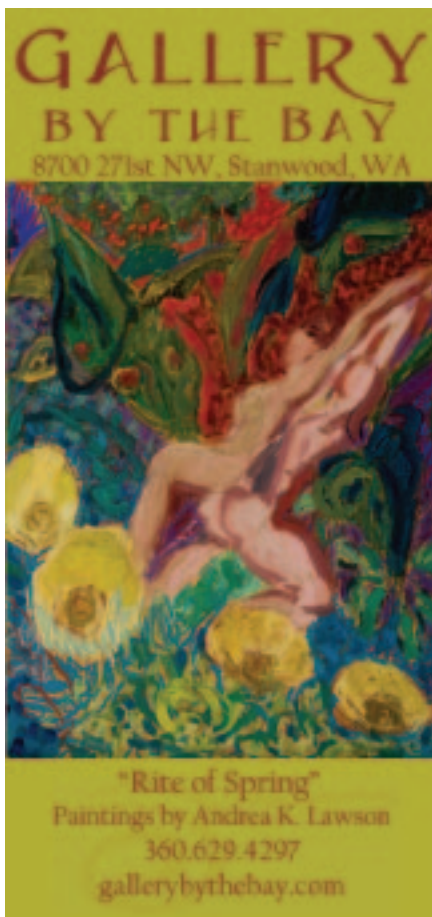


Local Artist Paints Anacortes Red — and Yellow, Blue and Orange

by **Amanda Baltazar**

Color explodes off the canvas in Alfred Currier's paintings, but that's no surprise since those featured in his current show mostly depict Skagit Valley, including its tulip fields and filtered light.

The show, 'Skagit Legacy,' which runs from April 6 to 30 at Insights Gallery in Anacortes, is this local painter's first show since 2006. He's a recognized Northwest artist, whose paintings adorn the homes of many art collectors, although an accumulation of his work is a rarity. One piece can take three to four weeks to complete, and this show is comprised of a



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dozen new oil paintings—a year's worth of work.

The paintings are all impasto, a style in which layers of paint lie on top of a canvas, creating rich textures. Several focus on the tulip fields and the migrant workers, a group of people for whom Currier has great empathy and whose strong work ethic he admires.

"I try not to paint them depressed or glorified, but as they are," he says.

Currier works in triads of color. Within each colored area there is a slightly redder, more yellow or more blue hue, which the eye blends at a distance. In 'Greenhouse Effect,' for example, the mountains contain blue-blue, green-blue and red-blue, while the sky is yellow-yellow, red-yellow and blue-yellow. All of these shades mean that at different times of day, as the light changes, the painting takes on a new look, Currier explains. "The whole idea is to get the colors to jump and glow in different lighting conditions."

This glow can really be seen in "Tangerine Fields," which emits intense color and warmth. A depiction of the view from the bridges over the La Conner Channel, looking south off Route 20, the luminescent painting is varying hues of orange, conveying the intensity of a sunrise or sunset, left to the viewer's interpretation.

No stranger to the tulip fields, Currier has been painting them, and the migrant workers, for about 18 years. He incorporated the workers because, he explains, "I taught figure painting in Chicago and missed it. I started sketching the farm workers to fill this basic need of keeping my skills sharp."

It's no coincidence that Currier has been painting the Skagit Valley for as long as he's lived here, for that was when he found his painter's voice. Before then, he'd simply been emulating other painters and his art lacked the character of today's work.



"Greenhouse Effect," 32"x42", oil on canvas (2008).
Below: Notice the texture in this close-up detail.



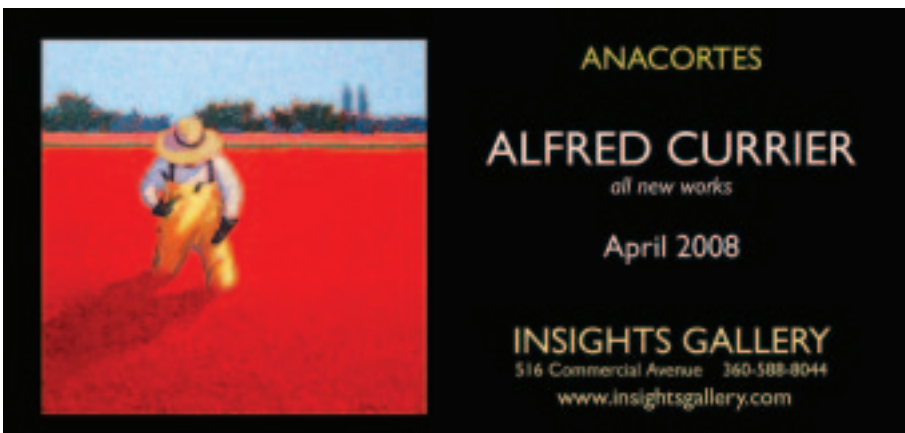
Although he's now established, Currier says his ideas of what constitutes art have become less certain. "When I was younger, I knew exactly what art was but now that I'm older, I've become less sure. If it affects you, it's good, even if you hate it. Art has to convey emotion, not just technical wizardry.

Currier's work is now mostly impasto oil painting done in his studio, although he still occasionally paints outside, on location. "I like painting from real life rather than from photographs," says Currier. There's too much information in a photograph, he explains, and a painter tends to become a slave to replicating it exactly. Painting from a drawing "involves you in the creative process because you have to be inventive," he says.

Every year Currier travels and paints on location. He's been to Uruguay, Italy, Argentina, France, Mexico and Holland, and throughout the United States and Canada. "Traveling breaks up your approach and you come back to the studio with a fresh eye," he points out.

But he's completely at home in the Skagit Valley. "I love this area for the people. I grew up in Ohio and it is fairly conservative; everybody walks and talks the same and if you have red shoelaces, you're out there. Here there are so many odd people that I feel right at home. There are a lot of extremely creative people dotted around these islands, and that's what makes this place special."

Amanda Baltazar is an Anacortes-based business writer.



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ALFRED CURRIER
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